

Dear Outlook CWL,

Thank you for the support you gave me for my IMPACT Vancouver 2015 mission! It was greatly appreciated, and I know that your financial and spiritual contributions helped our mission as a whole achieve success. Due to the work of our IMPACT group, countless people were led closer to God and made the choice to put Christ at the centre of their lives. The missionaries were also “impact”ed by the work we did, and the skills we’ve learned in evangelization and about our beautiful Roman Catholic traditions are now dispersed across the country as we all return to our respective homes. From Victoria, BC, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, there are young people who are on fire to share the Gospel in their home communities thanks to their experience on IMPACT.

Before I left Saskatchewan, you gave me two of the emergency blankets that your group quilted with the instructions to donate them to someone who needs them. I brought them to Vancouver with me, and I did manage to find someone to give them to. At first, I actually used them on my own bed! During the month of May, our house was very cold, and the blanket I brought myself wasn’t enough to keep me warm, so I layered the two blankets on top. I was very thankful for the extra warmth!

Towards the end of mission, I began to search more actively for someone who would appreciate the blankets you gave me. One particular person came to mind, and her story is heart-wrenching. About halfway through the mission, a group of us IMPACT missionaries went out one evening to do some outreach to the homeless that live in the streets around Holy Rosary Cathedral and Gastown. It wasn’t an official IMPACT event – one of the missionaries just suggested it to the group, and we had about twelve missionaries join him for the evening. We didn’t bring much with us as we went out in groups of three or four people. Instead of offering food or money, we wanted to simply offer the gift of our time to those who are homeless. We went to strike up conversations, hang out, listen to their stories, and pray with them. We wanted to send the message that they are seen and heard by others, even when most of the people who pass them on the street ignore them or look upon them in judgment.

My group and I had a long discussion with a young woman named Krystal. She was panhandling on the street in front of a busy restaurant in Gastown, and my group (two men accompanied me) sat on the ground with her and played a game of crazy eights using the deck of cards that we brought along. It was a good icebreaker, and afterwards we chatted for a long time. She shared with us about how she came to be on the street, her new husband of one month who has severe addiction problems, her own struggles with drug addiction, her babies – a daughter in Ontario and a little boy who was removed from her. When she revealed that she was only 25 years old, her story became even more shocking. It made me realize how privileged I am, and how my own circumstances and upbringing have led me to where I am, as well as the extreme challenges and barriers that she faces due to her position in society. It was a life-changing experience, and now I find it impossible to look at a homeless person without asking what it is that brought them to this position, and what there is that I can do to help them, however seemingly insignificant. At the end of our conversation with Krystal, we asked if we could pray over her. She agreed, and as we extended our hands towards her, she began to cry. She told us that our encounter with her was something she appreciated and greatly needed, since she had been keeping her struggles to herself for far too long. I felt honoured to have heard her story, and I sincerely wished there was more I could do.

Throughout the rest of the mission, I wanted to go back and visit Krystal, but my schedule didn’t afford any time to go and search for her. In particular, I wanted to offer her the blankets that you gave me. There was only one day that I was free and available to go look for her, but she wasn’t in her spot. She

told us that she's usually in the same place, so I am hopeful this just means that I went by at a bad time, and nothing has happened to her. If you could keep her in your prayers, I know it would be immeasurably helpful, and I know Krystal would appreciate it immensely.

Since I wasn't able to give the blankets to Krystal, I decided to offer them to the Madonna House ladies. The Madonna House is a lay apostolate community, and they have three women living in Vancouver – Emmanuella, Kay, and Martha. They've taken vows to live as consecrated single people, and they follow the teachings of Catherine Doherty. These ladies attend St. John the Apostle parish, where we had an IMPACT team. Their main vocation is to provide prayer ministry and formation for the people of that parish. They are also main distributors of publications by Madonna House members, and they aid anyone who contacts with them in need of help. Aside from my main missionary work and day job, I did some volunteering at the Madonna House for them. I helped them garden, make birthday cards, and clean their house. During the final week of mission, I offered Emmanuella the blankets, and she had some people in mind to offer them to. I know that whoever she gives them to will no doubt be very grateful and make good use of them.

Once again, thank you very much for your generous contributions towards our ministry in Vancouver. I hope you repeat the emergency blanket project again in the future, since it is a useful and selfless way to offer assistance to those who are in need of a little extra warmth. In addition, financially supporting Catholic Christian Outreach results in students across Canada (and now the world, as CCO expands to campuses in Uganda and does mission work in Ireland and Mexico) getting to know God on a personal level and coming into the Catholic faith.

Thank you for helping so many hands and feet spread the Word!

God bless,

Ava Tomaszewicz