

How long do we wait?



Edmonton Urban Native Ministry meets the social and spiritual needs of people struggling with social exclusion and poverty. This ministry is known for being present and available to help all who enter its doors.

One of the many ways that we at Edmonton Urban Native Ministry seek to enrich the lives of marginalized people in our city is through piano lessons for children. One day, after we first started running the program, nobody showed up for the lessons. Our volunteers, who had prepared for the children, did not say anything, but I could tell they were disappointed.

A couple of days later, I got a phone call from a mom whose son missed the first session because she was sick and couldn't bring him. She asked me, "Were you there waiting for my son?" When I answered "yes," I could hear her crying on the other end of the phone. "Thanks for being there for us," she said through her tears.

Her deeply moving words of thanks touched our hearts and transformed the way that we understand our work at Edmonton Urban Native Ministry. We've

come to realize that waiting is an important part of what we do. In ministry, we often ask, "How long should we wait?" The answer is simple: we should wait as long as the father waited for his son in the parable of the prodigal son.

Now, lots of children are coming to piano lessons every week. Like the father in the parable, we waited and then celebrated when the children came. Ours is a ministry of presence. We "ARE THERE" in the city of Edmonton, ready to welcome with open arms those who are looking for a friendly place for eating, internet, clothes, talking, sharing and resting. We believe that God our father is right there waiting with us for his sons and daughters to come back home.

The Rev. Tim Choi

Read: Luke 15:11-24

Reflect

When we read the parable of the prodigal son, many of us think of beloved friends and family members who are distanced from our lives. We imagine what it would be like to welcome those who left, particularly due to difficult or complex circumstances, back into our homes and families. We pray that we will be as good as the father in the story: generous in love and abounding with compassion.

Edmonton Urban Native Ministry's story challenges us to broaden our understanding of the parable. There are many in our world who have nobody waiting for them. What if we lived our lives prepared to welcome any child of God whose choices or life circumstances have distanced them from society? How can we become like the father in this parable for them?

In the parable we see a father who is:

- Freedom-giving — "...so he divided his property between them." (12)
- Compassionate — "...his father saw him and was filled with compassion." (20)
- Exuberant in his love — "...he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." (20)
- Generous — "...bring out a robe — the best one — and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate." (22-23)
- Joyful — "And they began to celebrate." (24)

The ministry of presence grows in us when we cultivate the qualities of our heavenly Father. Like the volunteers at Edmonton Urban Native Ministry who patiently waited and did not grow weary, we are called to practice these traits in our everyday lives. In doing so, we make space for God to work through us and give us cause to celebrate.

Discuss

1. Are you waiting for someone in your life to come home? What are you doing to prepare for their arrival?
2. Who in your community might not have anyone waiting for them? What outreach ministries does your congregation participate in to serve those living on the margins? Do you carry them out with the exuberant love, anticipation and generosity of the father?
3. What would it look like to show these qualities to people you meet every day?

Sing

#706 — Come, let us sing

#665 — Lord Jesus, you shall be my song

Prayer Focus

Please pray for our Indigenous ministries and all inner-city ministries reaching out to people living on the margins. Pray that people who use these services not only have their physical needs met, but through the actions of those who work and volunteer encounter the living God who waits for them with open arms.

Pray

Gracious and Generous God, you wait for us with open arms, even though we often turn away. Help us to do the same for others. Open our eyes to see those who do not have anyone to welcome them home. Give us the courage to be freedom-giving and generous in all circumstances. And teach us to embody your way of exuberant love, joy and celebration.