October 18, 2013 Andrew Obirek

Lighthouse Mission

Lighthouse Mission is a non-profit organization located in the heart of Winnipeg that has been providing basic human needs to the less fortunate people of Winnipeg for 102 years, since 1911. In a generous 90-minute interview with Ambassador Richard Kunzelman, the Mission, challenges, and operations of the organization were discussed.

Those who come to the Lighthouse Mission for help all have a story. They are the very poor, some of whom are homeless, others live in small rented rooms but are mentally ill or disabled, and many suffer from addictions. There are also teen run-aways. Usually 85% of the people are male, and the other 15%, are women, some of whom might have small children with them. Each of them is in dire need.

There are three characteristics that make Lighthouse Mission unique: its Ambassador, Richard Kunzelman, day-to-day operations, and the challenges of the Mission.

Richard Kunzelman has been working at Lighthouse Mission since 1995. Richard feels he was fortunate to be raised by a middle class family, which gave him opportunities and chances to run with them. He holds three degrees: a Bachelor of Arts degree, a degree in Theology, and a Master's Degree of Divinity. When life got tough, he always had the support of caring family and friends to help him. Richard's main job at Lighthouse Mission is to be out in the city, whether it is picking up groceries from partnering stores, picking up donations from houses, or canvasing. Richard canvases seven days a week (when he is not out picking up donations), and now also has a campaign started in rural Manitoba. He has a "base" set up out in Reinfeld, Manitoba (approximately 1.5 hours outside of Winnipeg), where he stays the night after driving out, then canvasses for an entire day and drives back to Winnipeg. However, he never travels further out of the city than that to canvas or pick up donations, as it is not cost-effective. With his work ethic and the skills that Richard could have developed if he had been working somewhere other than Lighthouse Mission, he could be earning at least twice as much of an income as he does now, yet he stays to serve these less fortunate of society. This means that he cannot afford luxuries (such as extravagant vacations, or perhaps a motorhome) that others can, but he is not bothered by this at all. As a result of his extreme involvement in the operations of Lighthouse Mission, Richard has almost no time for a social life. This doesn't matter to him, though, because he feels that the Mission's success stories are worth all the work. He admits to feeling tired and a little frustrated, some days, in wishing that there was a way that he could do more than he is already doing to help the people who are depending on them. Richard was excited to have a couple days off coming up over the Thanksgiving weekend.

Daily, Lighthouse Mission provides basic needs to people, namely an afternoon meal and day-shelter (from 2:00 to 3:30), where people can come in and rest while eating a meal if the weather is too hot/cold outside. The day-shelter service was improved last summer, when a new air conditioner was installed. Usually, Lighthouse Mission provides lunch and day-shelter for anywhere from one hundred to three hundred patrons, but there can easily be more than those numbers. Richard believes that conditions are actually getting worse for the poor, as during Christmas of 2012, they reportedly had just fewer than five hundred people that were served. The lunch consists of a bowl of soup, a sandwich, and coffee. There are clothes available for pick-up, laundry facilities, and personal counselling/spiritual support by request. On Friday nights, there is a chili dinner and a non-denominational prayer service where pastors from different churches come to deliver a message of hope. Not being tied to a specific religious order or faith means that anyone is welcome to come and listen, but this can raise challenges of its own. Because the Mission is independent, there isn't any backup available. There is no means of financial support forthcoming, no guaranteed financial aid, or volunteer base.

These basic human needs are derived from a theory called "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs". "This theory suggests that the most basic level of needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire (or focus motivation upon) the secondary or higher level needs." These "basic needs" are referred to as "Physiological Needs" by Maslow, and include, "breathing, food, water, sex, sleep, homeostasis (a process in which the body's internal environment is kept stable), and excretion." (Wikipedia, 2013)

There are four major challenges that Lighthouse Mission faces: Financial, food, clothing, and staffing (volunteering) challenges. Lighthouse Mission faces financial challenges mainly because they are not connected to any religious order or parish, which voids opportunities for some possible advertising/collection locations. Instead, Lighthouse Mission relies completely on individual and corporate donations for the majority of its income; there is no Government assistance. Mr. Kunzelman, the most public face of the organization, canvasses Winnipeg neighbourhoods seven evenings per week, year round, in the hope of catching Winnipeggers at home. He walks miles every single night, regardless of the weather to raise funds for the endeavor; yet this canvassing accounts for only 25% of the annual operating budget. Also, as mentioned earlier, the Mission, independent of any religious order, cannot depend on an order or a church for help with loans or grants. Lighthouse Mission must raise money on their own for any extra services that they might want/need to provide, all the while having to maintain the finances for ordinary day-to-day operations.

A tour of the facility revealed that the building is in a very sad state. The third floor is not well insulated (or lit) and is stacked mostly with out-of-season clothing. The stairs are narrow and rickety, the corridors are claustrophobic; floor tile is worn completely off, revealing original hardwood, and lath and plaster is falling from the ceiling in chunks, all of which made it

difficult to believe that this place was actually in Canada -- *in Winnipeg!* It is also hard to imagine that places like this are some peoples' entire existence.

Lighthouse Mission (669 Main St.) also owns the build next door at 667 Main St. The dream of the staff is to, one day, open the other property as a halfway house and detox center. Realistically, this goal is far from realization. It would cost much more than Lighthouse Mission is currently receiving to get 667 Main St. up to today's building code and bring in new furnishings (beds, bathrooms, etc.), not to mention meeting the payroll of highly skilled staff who would be needed to help the patrons.

Food and clothing challenges are related to how generous people get with their donations. For example, in September and October, there are larger donations of produce because people are cleaning out their gardens for the winter, and if they know they will not finish all the vegetables, they will donate some to Lighthouse Mission. In July and August, however, produce in gardens are still growing, so there are no vegetables for even the gardeners to eat. It is the same with clothing supply. There are many clothing donations, but different sizes of certain clothes might not always be available, and as the seasons change, whatever is required may not be available yet. In-season clothes are kept to be given out to anyone who needs clothing, no matter the weather. Most clothing donations are made by individuals, but kindness has struck some retail stores to donate sizeable amounts of clothing. A Mark's Work Warehouse once donated an entire store's contents to Lighthouse Mission. The most important clothing donations come from end of season/end of fashion period donations. Donations made at the end of fall and the end of winter are the most important, as this is when most winter coats go on sale or go out of style, and these people would never survive a Winnipeg winter without outerwear.

Staffing, more specifically, volunteering is another serious challenge that Lighthouse Mission faces. Without volunteers, there is no one to prepare and serve food, or organize the clothing. It must be stated that several of the Mission's patrons do help with certain tasks, such as grocery pick-ups and meal preparation. Like anyone else, those patrons who do volunteer find great satisfaction in a job well done, and don't really mind that there isn't a paycheque involved. Richard proudly emphasized that "...our people are not lazy, as so many onlookers may think, they are just often unable to hold employment for long periods, or cannot find work where their specific skills would be appreciated...many of them are just too rough around the edges to actually hold a permanent job." There have been some very difficult times: there have been days where Richard and just one volunteer alone had prepared lunch and served everyone that came to the Mission. If a St. Paul's student wanted to spend time volunteering at Lighthouse Mission, there are many ways to help, including preparing the food (by slicing/dicing vegetables and meat), sorting clothes upstairs, or assisting Richard with pickups.

There are many success stories of people who have been rehabilitated. But it is shocking and sad to know that the three full-time employees of Lighthouse Mission (Director Shaun, Joel, and Richard) are tirelessly using every skill that God has given them, yet are frustrated to know that they are meeting only the basic needs of the people who come through their doors. Sometimes, tired, they look around at the people before them, and wonder if this is really happening in their own city. The one problem that Richard has with the Mission is the understanding of why it is needed. He asked, "What is wrong with social and medical services that people have to live like this? Canada is a land of plenty."

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"Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?"

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.'

Matthew 25: 37-38, 40 (New International Version)

"Lord, teach me to be generous, Teach me to serve You as You deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not heed the wounds, to toil and not seek for rest, to labour and not to seek reward, save that of knowing that I do Your most Holy will."

Prayer of Generosity, St. Ignatius of Loyola

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Works Cited

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Wikipedia. Web. October 16, 2013. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs

Dear Richard,

I really want to thank you for your guidance on this project. Because you were able to give me so much time (90 minutes!) I had more than enough information to do a very good job on this project. My teacher awarded me full marks -- 35/35 -- so you can imagine how grateful I am for your input. Thank you also for a tour of the facility; it really completed the picture for me. Now I know how little you have to work with; it is amazing to see what you are able to accomplish. Here are some treats for you to share with your partners, but please take one package of peanut butter cookies and one jar of homemade salsa home for yourself.

Love, Andrew Obirek

P.S. Your patience with me was very Christ-like.