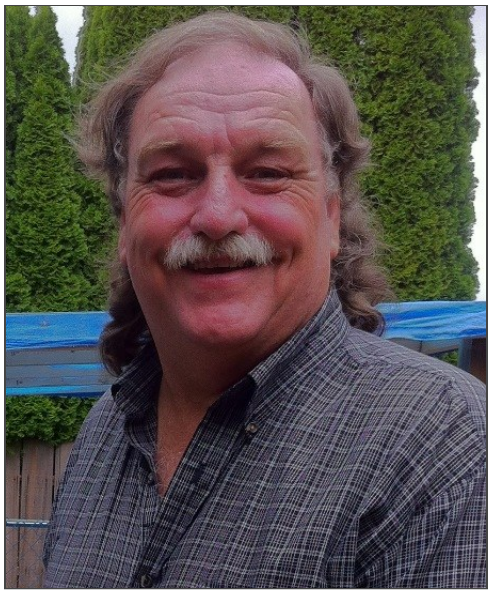
Barry Babcock



MARCH 17, 2014

Dear Friends of The Lord's Rain,

Those of you who have been receiving these missives over the past several years will know that I've written quite a few "farewells" to people we have known through The Lord's Rain and Gospel Mission and who have passed on.

I never thought I'd be writing this one.

Barry Babcook, senior pastor at Gospel Mission for the past 18 years, died this evening. He was 56, and about a month ago was diagnosed with cancer in multiple parts of his body. It's hard to say how it went unnoticed for so long -- what symptoms were noticed were put down to other things; but by the time he went for surgery to remove the tumor from his colon, it was so far advanced there was nothing doctors could do except leave him sedated and on life support.

That was on Saturday. This afternoon, they removed the life support, and just after 7 pm, he was gone.

Barry had actually ministered on the Downtown East Side since he was a teenager, freshly delivered from some pretty evil stuff, himself. He started out as a street preacher -- his wife, Judy, recalls that their first date was preaching in Gastown on a Saturday night. Barry's "sermons" mainly consisted of declaring, "Jesus loves you!" to the alcoholics and homeless. I never heard him talk about hellfire and damnation -- although he never denied that part of it -- but he kept coming back to that simple, eternal message that, whatever the "world" might think of you, God loves you to the end. There are other street preachers around Vancouver -- usually

on Granville Mall -- who hit the "sinners burn in hell" message pretty hard, and I wonder how many people they're really reaching. But I know this: countless people came to know the Lord because of Barry's loving, persistent message.

Barry and Judy ministered for several years in Taiwan, while Barry taught English. They adopted their two children -- Sheri from Taiwan, Anthony from a reserve on Northern Vancouver Island. Judy leads Worship at the Gospel Mission Sunday services, and Anthony, who has grown into a strong young man of God (and a rock through this recent time) often preaches the sermon. Barry was also one of the driving forces behind The Rock Church, which would meet in the Mission on Sunday evenings: he called it a "Jesus jam session", with music, prayer, teaching and general all-around Worship.

One of the temptations on the Downtown East Side is to get caught up in the politics and activism there. With so much despair in the area, it's easy to cry out about injustice and inequality and demand that someone else do something about it; sometimes, that involves defying the laws of the land. The problem is, the Bible commands us to obey those laws, regardless of how we feel about those laws. Barry somehow managed to stay above that, emerging more as an "actionist" -- someone who does what he or she can to address those issues -- and I believe that's what has made Gospel Mission unique and helped it thrive over the years.

Not that there weren't battles -- maybe "skirmishes" is a better word. In recent years, the Sunday street market -- where people from the area gather in Pigeon Park to hawk items of questionable provenance -- has been a particular bugaboo. Barry constantly had to make sure the pathway to the Mission door was kept clear so people could come to the services; he also had to pester City Hall to install portable toilets so people wouldn't relieve themselves in the alley. Inside the building, he had to deal with the anarchist "resistance" group that occupied one of the ground floor spaces for several years, and before that, the space was a needle

exchange and a "supervised" drug injection site, before that was made legal and moved elsewhere. Barry prayed constantly for the people involved with those endeavors, that they would come to know the Lord. As many of you know, the night that he changed his prayer to pray that the new tenants would be Christians was one of the early signs that The Lord's Rain should come into being. That was the same night that I had mentioned to Amelia that it would be great if there was some way to provide showers for people in the area because obviously, anything that was available wasn't adequate.

It was in the building of The Lord's Rain that Barry's gifts came into play. He was an electrician by trade and a handyman -- you could say that he held the Mission together, literally as well as figuratively. If something needed to be fixed, he got it done, even if it was, technically, the landlord's responsibility. With The Lord's Rain, if I was the one who received the direction, like Moses, Barry was Bezaleel, the one skilled in the crafts needed to build it (Exodus, chapter 31). Barry was the one who put out the "fleece" (see the explanation below), that is, asking for a specific sign that it should go ahead: "So long as the money is there," he said, "we're in."

Barry knew the practical side of things. In the attached photo ("Showers Project - the back area"), Barry appears to be thinking, "what have we gotten ourselves into?", but in fact, he was already scoping out the work to be done. As the project progressed and I preened for the cameras, he quarterbacked things, knowing exactly what was needed, what questions to ask, what permits we required and how to get it all. He worked with people like Brodie Collins (plumber), Murray Scott (building contractor), and Gerry Wall and his sons, Brandon and Jordan (also builders) to coordinate the tasks. He ensured that every permit was in order, every inspection done.

The other photo ("Barry at the hammer") shows Barry working on one of the trickier aspects: replacing the feed pipe from the city water main. To do that, he

had to jackhammer through the century-old concrete foundation in the Mission. When he finally cracked through, he dug down with his hands, and as he reached the pipe, discovered two things: an oyster shell and a handful of ashes.

The 300 block Carrall Street is on the site of what had been an aboriginal village around the time Vancouver was founded. And 331 Carrall Street was built in 1888, two years after the Great Vancouver Fire. You didn't need a history degree to figure out where those ashes came from.

We joked that if any antiquarians heard about it, they'd slap a stop-work order on us. Still, we took a moment to touch the ashes and the shell and connect with history, then put them back. Once the pipe was replaced, the section was re-concreted.

Barry may have shied away from the spotlight, but when we hit our financial crisis a year ago, he was able to reach out to the right people for funding we needed to stay afloat until something more secure could come in. Just before Christmas, he sent a concise but compelling letter to churches in the Apostolic Church of Pentecost, which founded Gospel Mission in 1929, detailing the current fund-matching arrangement with the R. Howard Webster Foundation. The response has been a true blessing.

In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Mark Antony states, "The evil that men do lives after them/The good is oft interrèd with their bones." That doesn't apply with Barry. I can't think of any "evil" associated with Barry, and won't, even after the initial grief has worn off; the good he has done will continue to live and manifest in ways we could never imagine. It starts with the people he directly witnessed to and counselled over nearly 40 years, continues with the hope those people gained and the others they have affected as a result; it's particularly so with The Lord's Rain, where countless people will be blessed by that outreach for years and years to come.

As we stood around in Barry's room at Ridge Meadows Hospital this morning, Anthony, and Stan Powers, pastor at Sonrise Church in Surrey and secretary of the Gospel Mission Society Board, recalled a piece of Scripture, which we all agreed was Barry's "life verse".

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

-- 1 John 3:16-18

Grace and peace to you all,

Drew Snider

You are invited to leave a personal message of condolence for the family.