

**Jonathan Massimi**, Supervisor of Community Centres with the City of Kitchener

*This month we are happy to share a reflection from Jonathan Massimi, a leading Canadian Asset Based Community Development Practitioner, priest, and our keynote speaker at the 2021 Spiritual Life Conference with Christian Horizons on June 2nd.*

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*“The real world is made of stories.” – Rachel Naomi Remen*

Stories shape us, form us, and make us who we are. Most spiritual and cultural traditions draw on stories to help convey important truths about the world around us and our experience of it. The stories that Jesus tells in Christian Scriptures capture my interest and my imagination. These stories are known as “parables.” Jesus used parables to provoke thought and awaken hearts, and in a strange way these parables *read us* as much as we read them!

I’ll explain what I mean by sharing a story of my own. As part of my ordination process for becoming a priest, I was assigned to the mental health unit of a local hospital as part of my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). I would make daily visits and host a weekly conversation circle. I chose to use the Parable of the Sower to start one of these conversations. I introduced it by saying, “here is a story from long ago.” I went on to tell them about the farmer who went out to sow his seed, some of which was eaten by birds, other seed fell on rocky ground, or among thorns, and finally seed that fell on good soil and produced a crop that multiplied up to a hundred times! (Mark 4:3-8). Rather than reading on to the interpretation (Mark 4:10-20), I asked, “what seed do you think you are?” One woman’s response struck me. She struggled with deep depression, her husband had passed, and her children had moved away. She said, “I am the seed eaten by the birds.” I asked, “who are the birds for you?” She responded, “the birds are my children. I have given my life, nourishing them.” *In this way, the parable was reading her.* The parable gave words to her own life and experience.

Over a year into a global pandemic, many of us may be feeling depleted and worn out. In caring for others, we can feel like there’s not much left to give – like the seed that has fallen on the rocks, or in the thorns, or even that was eaten by birds!

When I read this parable, though, I see a farmer who is indiscriminately slinging seed without a care as to where those seeds are going to land. Clearly, he has seed to spare. In the same way, I believe that God still scatters seeds of hope *abundantly* throughout our communities.

*Hope is not in scarce supply.*

Miraculously, as we begin to look for signs of hope in the world, hope starts to multiply in us! It's not easy. Hope needs to be nurtured and cared for. These seeds of hope can be hard to spot amidst the thorns and the rocks. But as we receive hope, we begin to share it with others. We, too, become signs and seeds of hope wherever we are – planted where we find ourselves. There will be times when we nourish, times when we suffer, times when we are burnt out, and times when we flourish. Also, there are times when other people are 'sown' into our lives by God. Do we take the time to receive and to celebrate the hope that they bring?

I no longer work in a mental health hospital, but in my role with the City of Kitchener, I still believe that hope is *abundant*, and I am working to sow seeds of hope myself and embody that hope. Take some time to let this parable "read" you. What seed are you? Where are the seeds of hope in your life?

### Making the Connection

- Consider Jonathan's questions. Do you relate with one type of seeds? The Sower? something else in the story? Feel free to be creative in your answer!
- In what ways do the people who use Christian Horizons' services help bring hope or plant hope in their communities? How has this taken place during the pandemic, and how do you hope they will be welcomed in their communities coming out of the pandemic?