

Communitas'
Annual Report
2020-2021



2020-21 Activities Overview

An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, showing various skyscrapers and buildings. White smoke or steam is rising from several buildings, creating a hazy atmosphere. The background shows a wide expanse of the city and a body of water in the distance.

- Open Door
- Circles
- The Gospel Zone
- Digital Literacy Workshop Series
- Social and Emotional Learning Pilot Project
- Sou'Wester

Open Door



Attendance

	2015 - 2106	2016 - 2017	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021
Escorted out of the pens	149	182	192	204	172	0
Returned to community	671	714	493	386	1071 Combined	408
Volunteers	683	786	695	768		904
TOTAL	1503	1682	1380	1358	1243	1312

Circles

- Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA)
- Circles of Reintegration
- High needs individuals – Regular contact and support



Number of circles	Number of circle meetings	Volunteer hours
7	164	500+

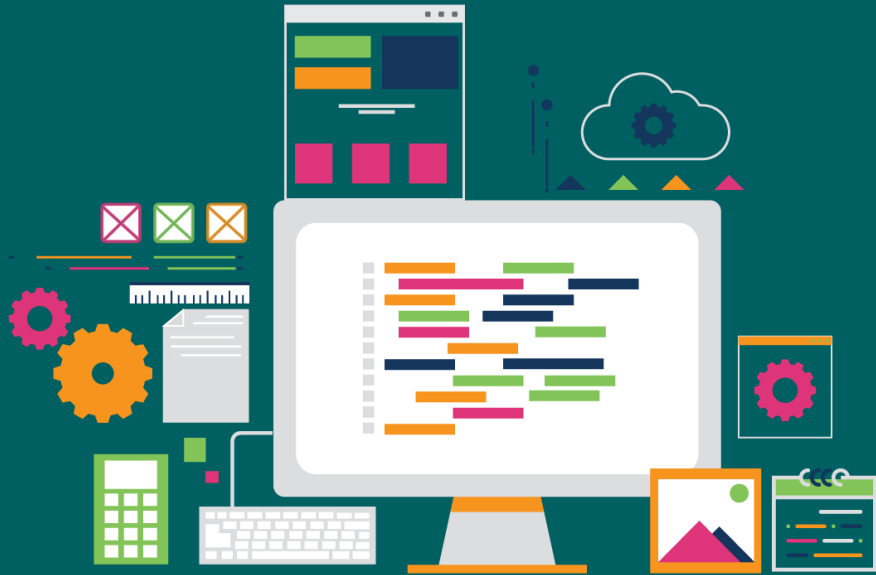
The Gospel Zone

- Twice/month on Zoom
- Meaningful space to build community



Number of meetings	Average participants per meeting
17	9

Digital Literacy Workshop Series



- Internet basics, apps
- Internet safety
- Community resources
- Learning experience

Number of sessions

6

**Average participants
per meeting**

11

Social Emotional Learning Pilot Project

- Community-based social and emotional learning program for Communitas Montreal
- SEL - understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, developing empathy, building healthy relationships, and making responsible decisions
- Module – Setting goals



Number of sessions

Average participants per meeting

5

11

Sou'Wester

Communitas' grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

the Sou'Wester

Summer 2020

OPEN DOOR ALIVE AND WELL



Celebrating 19 Years of an "Open Door" to the Community

Robin has attended Open Door meetings every Tuesday evening since meetings started in September 2001 (except for a couple of health-related absences) - much as many of you, and I, have been at

church every Sunday morning for many years. The principal likeness is that for many who attend, Open Door is their intentional community, as is church for some. Though many at Open Door may not acknowledge, or even understand the likeness, for me it is deep and essential. In each case there is the experience, and nourishment of communion, a coming together significantly in a transition from one condition, typically involving isolation and mistrust, to another condition, of acceptance, respect, inclusion, trust and affection. It is that spiritual dimension of transition, of life-in-change, that I see as essential in the experience of communion which takes place in the movement of the Sunday liturgy and which is also at the heart of the Open Door experience. Even if I would not use this language with Robert or other fellow pilgrims at Open Door, each is liturgical, each is sacramental, they share a common worldly path on which Kingdom is ever possible, even sometimes near.

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In the award-winning film, in the Heat of the Night, Sidney Poitier's Detective Tibbs memorably leans on a recalcitrant witness in a small town in the Jim Crow South: "Hear me, good mama. Please, don't make me have to send you to jail. Because there's White time in jail, and there's Colored time in jail. The worst kind of time you can do is Colored time." Some fifty years later, the Sou'Wester wants to know if that warning holds true of penitentiary time in Quebec.

Consult a Black inmate, and you are not likely to receive positive reviews of Correctional Service Canada's (CSC) record on race-related issues. Then again, select White inmates' comment on life behind bars, and they neither

will commend the government's hospitality. One sees the limits of sporadic, subjective anecdotal evidence, which not so long ago afforded the only portrait available. That situation was remedied by three ground-breaking studies, although one casts a wider net than our narrow focus on the Black prison experience; while another, the most sustained examination to date of ethnic minorities in the Canadian criminal justice system, puts the spotlight only on the provincial province of Ontario.

True to its name, the Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System (1994/95) uncovered systemic racism in every part of the system. In the specific area of correctional institutions, if we may borrow the words of Canada's Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI), the Commission discovered "pervasive racial hostility and intolerance within prison environments, racial segregation of inmates within and among prisons, and racial inequality in regards to the delivery of institutional services." Its pioneering work served as a foundation for the OCI's own study of 2012-2013, A Case Study of Diversity in Corrections: The Black Inmate Experience in Federal Penitentiaries, Final Report (2014), which could not have been better targeted for our purposes.

The last of the three studies, and the broadest in scope, was published in 2015. The author of Ethnicity, Minorities and the Canadian Correctional System, Dr. Emerson Douyon, a highly-respected authority in criminal

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We would love to hear from you!



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Fall 2020

PETER RETIRES! (WELL SORT OF...)



Peter Hulsh, a familiar face for many people.

Although his retirement is now official, we'll still be seeing him around!

As the founder of Communitas way back in 1999 when we were known as Montreal Southwest Community Ministries (MSCM), Peter has been our leader from the start, serving as Project Coordinator, Chair of the Steering Committee, President of our Board of Directors, and now, lifetime Honorary Board Member.

Peter tells us that when he started in chaplaincy, there was an understanding that chaplains should retire or move on when they had served for 11 years. It is now 22+ years since Peter started as Chaplain at Cowansville Institution, albeit in a part-time role. The 11 year guideline applied to full-time chaplains; by 2000, other part-time work was added at

Drummond Institution and then Federal Training Centre, and Montreal-Southwest Community Ministries (MSCM) was up and running, including the beginnings of CoSA work, together constituting much more than a full-time vocation.

Effective 10 October 2020, Peter has resigned as an active member of the Communitas Board and as its President, bringing to an end his formal responsibilities and activity in Communitas, so the retirement guideline has finally been met. His vocation continues however, and we can expect to see Peter among us in various capabilities, including honorary Board membership, as a CoSA volunteer and Open Door regular, coupled with his ongoing voluntary participation and guidance of our in-reach at CSC institutions.

Interview on Page 2

Expressing gratitude and support during COVID

In a race against rapidly gathering storm clouds, Patrick, a long-time Communitas volunteer and published cartoonist, expresses the gratitude we all feel toward one another at this time. Whether we show our support through actions or prayers, we remain committed to each other during the pandemic. "It has been many, many years since I've done a chalk drawing," he said.



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...more Sou'Wester

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Winter 2021

GORDON'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

On Christmas Day 2020, Gordon prepared a traditional Christmas dinner at his home for 81 people.

Given that gatherings are prohibited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gordon then delivered the meals, with the help of volunteers, to some of Montreal's most vulnerable and marginalized men and women who live in social and transitional housing across the city.

ROMELE, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people access decent and affordable housing, donated money to buy the food. Communitas's financial contribution was used to make Christmas stockings that were filled with chocolates, candy, mandarin oranges, soft drinks and Christmas cards. If social gatherings are still prohibited in the Spring, Gordon hopes to prepare and home deliver another holiday feast for Easter.

Dave



HENRY AND KAT

It was a cold and dark evening as we passed through the last prison gate, leading to the chapel a hundred feet away.

We'd done this countless times, but this time something was different. Off to the side, a dark figure huddled against the chill, and

upon closer inspection, the person seemed to be cradling something inside of his olive-coloured prison-issue coat. Two dark eyes peered out, eyes which grew wider as our curiosity brought us closer, so we kept our distance. The inmate's name was Henry, aka Red, and his gray, feline friend Kat was one of the feral cats that roamed the grounds inside the high double fence surrounding the prison. Apparently they have mastered the art of entering and leaving the establishment, much like the prisoners on Hogan's Heroes. Besides keeping the rodent population in check, they subsist on food that the inmates leave for them during their exercise time in the yard.

Henry is 56 years old with sandy red hair, soft-spoken, articulate and shy, and he has spent the last 36 years of his life behind bars. By his own admission, he is a loner, not comfortable in groups and cautious about making friends. So he appears anti-social, but as he says "I don't just jump right in, especially on my side of the fence where even though you meet some nice and good people, there are others whose moral compass is out of whack".

But Henry loves cats. Over the years, Henry has, by his count, taken care of 25 adult cats and nearly 100 kittens, like Turbo and Blitz, a

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Spring 2021

A Solitary Letter

The story of Canada's reliance on solitary confinement continues to be written. An eloquent and poignant letter, which the Sou'Wester reproduces here with the author's permission, serves as a moving backdrop to that tale.

March 26, 2021

Madame Anne Kelly
CSC Commissioner

Re: Segregation, solitary confinement.

This letter is written because of my visceral reaction to statements that are attributed to you in an article written by Justin Ling on February 28, 2021. It is written that you made the statements that solitary confinement does not exist and that some inmates do not want to come out of their cells.

As an inmate serving a life sentence and who has had many segregation placements—some of which I clearly earned— I was shocked by this answer. It left me feeling frustrated, angry and revolted. Why? Because every inmate and employee of the CSC knows that segregation exists. And to deny this fact and the very negative, destructive consequences of segregation feeds mistrust and unhealthy views towards the professionalism of the CSC.

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**Getting Together
At Open Door**

Want to Meet at "Open Door"?

A well kept secret?

A treasured activity?

A longing for fellowship that the Pandemic has pushed astray?

All that precedes, and much, much more. Yes, the Pandemic has changed Open Door - like it has changed many other things in our lives. However, the directors at Communitas - the creators, sponsors and brain trust behind Open Door quickly adapted and had the next weekly meeting set up as a Zoom call. And not only did Open Door survive: in many ways it continues to flourish in this new virtual setting.

Someone remarked that Zoom is the cultural equivalent of those old scene scenes we used to watch in the movies: "Are you there?" "Can you hear me?" "You are muted - show us a sign!"

So while we cannot meet in person it has allowed us to interact with presenters from Middle Canada, the West Coast and attendees from next door and far and away. It is kind of cool.

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2021-22

Operations



- Context: coming out of COVID, progressive opening
- New normal
- Year of transitions - coordination, CoSA Canada, Board of Directors
- Opportunities – OD book project, SEL, Digital Literacy

