



HAMILTON CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP HEARTBEAT



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Face of Love

by Gwen Groen

HCF Heartbeat Article: The Face of Love
I used to think I understood love. As a young person, I knew my parents loved me. When I came to know Jesus, I believed God loved me. But I had not begun to grasp the depth of God's love until I had children.

Having children has taught me more about God's love than anything else in my life. My children have expanded for me how I see the dynamic love of the Trinity: The Father who creates us and intimately know us, the Spirit who protects and guides us, the Son who has gone and goes to every length to defend us, even to the point of laying down his life.

Two weeks ago, my two kids (ages 2.5 and 1.5) were sick with the flu. Neither of them touched their toys for days; they just slept and cuddled with me and took sips of water. As hard as it was dealing with the tears that come along with congestion and chills, there were several moments when their little heads were lying on my chest,

just wanting to be near their mummy, that my heart felt like it was going to burst. I am sitting in the rocking chair in the nursery with Annalise, my baby, and I suddenly feel so much love for her I begin to weep. I am not weeping for sadness, but a mixture of joy, gratitude, awe and grief.

Joy, because I love this precious girl so, so, very much; because just to be with me brings me such delight.

Gratitude, because I don't for one second take for granted the gift and privilege it is to be a mother. These children are God's gift to me, who, by God's grace, I get to nurture and raise and for that I am so thankful.

Awe, because I didn't know I could ever feel so much love for such a small human being. Awe also because the Spirit reminds me that what I feel for my child, Heaven feels a thousand fold for me...

And finally, yes, grief. Because ultimately, I don't own this child. She belongs to the Lord. One day, she will grow up and make her own choices and I will have to let her go. She will gradually exercise more and [cont'd on page 2...](#)

Monica DiFrancesco Profile

by Lisa Cowling

When the door opened on her Dundas home I was greeted with the face of love. Arms wide open to hug me, beautiful music playing in the background, slippers for my feet and a table spread with an amazing array of healthy and flavorful foods. All this spoke loudly to me that I was not only welcomed but my arrival was anticipated with pleasure. Yes, I felt the love!

When I asked Monica, however about this month's theme her response was humble and immediately her thoughts went to the work the Lord is doing in her heart, feeling like she falls short of showing His love like she would like. I

chose to not argue with her (although I thought I could present a good case) and just celebrated how she doesn't live on the surface of life but goes deep in her thoughts, deep in her walk with Jesus.

I have known Monica for about 16 years. She and her husband, Robert have graciously shared their children with us, somewhat adopting us as 'honorary Di-Francescos!' All of their children: Lydia, David, Julia and Evelyn had attended and served in our youth group and quickly found a permanent place in our hearts. Over those years I have observed Monica's healing journey and applauded as she stopped running away from her emotional and mental health issues to courageously facing her giants and trusting God to set her free. Her story is a powerful faith-building one and I would recommend anyone needing

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PHOTO BY CLAIRE DAM

Face Of Love cont'd...

more of her own free will (she's already trying at 1 years old!), and this is good thing. My desperate prayer is that that she maintain that beautiful, pure faith of a child; that she know that her Father in Heaven loves her a thousand times more than I do. In this rocking chair moment, I weep because my love is so great, my heart aches to contain it.

This heart-aching love I feel for my child is but a shadow of God's love. His love for you and me is a thousand times more great than what I feel for this baby! Is God's heart actually aching to contain the sheer extent of his love for me?

In the same way my babies are my flesh and blood, we are God's own, made in His image. Psalm 139 tells us he knit us together in our mothers' wombs; we are hand-made by the Creator. He thinks we're so beautiful he calls us his masterpieces (Eph 2:10 NLT)!

The way a mother gazes at her newborn baby, studying him from head to toe, thinking he is the most beautiful thing she ever lay eyes on, that is way our Father gazes

at us. He knows us so intimately that he counts the hairs on our head (Matt 10:30). A good Father wants to protect his children.

As parents, we set boundaries for our children to keep them safe ("no jumping on the couch, you might fall!"). Andy and I want so deeply for Noah and Annalise to trust us as parents, to trust that we love them and always want their best. So often they resist our boundaries when we are simply trying to protect them. How often do we act the same towards God? God sets boundaries and commands which we are to obey in order that we might be safe and healthy and live our best life. He is always for us and never against us, just like a good parent.

I often imagine the Spirit brooding over His children like an impassioned mother. To "brood" means to protect one's young, to cover with wings, to keep safe. Psalm 91 tells us that He "will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection" (v. 4).

As a mother, my love goes beyond protec-

tion: I would actually rather be hurt than to watch my child be hurt.

This is the most powerful demonstration of God's love for us: that he, through Jesus, would lay down his own life for us. John 15:13 tells us that "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus is willing to be our defender, to be our advocate, to "go to bat for us" so to speak. He died and rose for us so we can walk in full freedom and learn to trust Him.

We will never fully grasp how infinite God's love is until we meet Jesus face to face. I am grateful, however, that God has chosen little ones to reveal to me a just glimpse God's fierce, joyful, courageous, transforming love. This familiar hymn captures the expanse of our Father's love so poetically:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.* 🍷

Burlington, Hamilton & Buffalo area. In it he outlined his findings below.

His criteria: "We only cared about it being a place that people were proud to attend. If you want people to visit your church you need to give them a reason."

Top 5 Reasons He WOULD Return:

1. Being Genuinely Welcomed:

"To get people to return they NEED to feel welcomed. A door greeter isn't being welcoming; that's expected. Being welcomed is having ordinary people around you say hi and seem happy you're there."

"The best welcome for a visitor is from leadership. When someone from the platform greets you, it makes you feel all the more special. For instance, my favourite welcome was at Victory where the worship leader approached me to say "hi" despite the hundreds of others there. In all of the churches he was the only worship team member to say hi. That needs to change."

2. The church wasn't passionate:

"If you and/or your congregation give the feeling that you don't want to be there neither will a visitor."

3. The church wasn't genuine:

"Be proud where you are strong and thank God for blessing you while also being appropriately honest about where you as a

church need work. Perfection is intimidating and phoniness is repelling."

4. We didn't feel needed:

"Some people want a church to hide in or to have cater to their needs, but if you want to grow your church people need to feel like there's a place for them where they can contribute. How you can do this is the trick because you don't want to seem desperate. I recommend reading To Sell is Human by Daniel H. Pink."

5. The church seemed desperate:

"Just like in dating and sales, desperation is a repellent. There is nothing more demoralizing for a church then for someone up front to be saying "We need more of your..." Please, please STOP using this type of language. STOP asking for volunteers at the pulpit. When you ask for volunteers up front you only get the same workers feeling guilty and offering to help. At the same time you'll have everyone else thinking "They're asking again!" Besides, this tactic is guaranteed to fail because with a crowd of people around us we just think "Someone else will do it."

It's always better to ask people individually--because it makes them feel important and good enough to be asked.

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Or if you need to make announcements at the front change your language from "We need you..." to "This is your chance..." It goes from asking for a favour to giving the congregation the favour!

The Top 5 Reasons I Would Go Back to the Church

1. The church including both the leadership and those in the congregation are friendly
2. To be part of the good things a church is doing for God and the community
3. It feels safe and loving; the last thing I want is more guilt or stress pushed on me
4. It's a place that will help me grow through teaching and serving
5. The people up front know how to have fun; fun and uptightness are both contagious; what would you rather have in your church?

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encouragement to ask her more about it. For the article's sake she is passing along this one tidbit of advice: "Just keep going forward! The enemy often tries to take me back, I've lived too many years with the past haunting me, forgive and get on with it!"

A war has been waged on 'shame' and Monica continues to go after this in prayer with the Lord. In the wonderfully unique way that she processes, Monica, in her prayer time took that word, 'shame', turned it backwards (because she wants the opposite in her life) and crafted an acronym as a declaration: "Emmanuel Makes ALL of me Holy, Healthy and Healed by His Sacrifice!"

There is that multi-levelled thinking again! Monica living, not on the surface of life but going to another level to plunge the depths...truly a treasure-seeker for God! Remember that amazing lunch I was served? When I asked about the spice on the nuts for my salad she not only knew what it was but knew it was an anti-inflammatory! She encouraged me to layer the flavours saying "It's a dance party happening in my mouth". The music that was playing was another example...a collaboration of an Orthodox Jew and a Christian praising God together! No flat-lined existing for this daughter of the King! She lives prophetically, seeing God in nature and in the people and life circumstances around her.

This is a very unique 'out of the box'

Chad's biggest frustration was the lack of follow-through on behalf of the leadership. After he visited a church he would follow-up with an email to the pastor. And out of 40 churches only one pastor returned his email.

HCF is starting a new initiative whose primary focus is to Welcome, Connect, Assess and Make Room for newcomers. Another part of this new initiative is to track congregants and not allow anyone to be forgotten, left-behind or alone.

And the final part of this initiative is the Exit--when congregants feel like they need to move on, our goal is to talk them through it, listen to their concerns and questions and bless them on their way.

It starts with all of us first though. It starts with Pastor Dave and the Elders. And it starts with the ministry leaders and

lady who is not afraid to explore life and experience new things. I asked her daughter, Lydia for a comment: "My mom is a great example of being open to trying new things (Hey, I just said that!)" and busting out of her comfort zone. A few years ago she watched Evelyn and me participate in a triathlon. She decided that the following year she would join us, even though she didn't really know how to swim. She got herself a bike, started cycling and running, and took swimming lessons. She did really well in the competition! She's always willing to try and learn how to do things on the computer and after growing up with a mom who knits and not learning, she's decided to try that too."

Evelyn added: "I'm really proud of my mom! Her commitment to personal and spiritual growth is inspiring. She is a real overcomer. She doesn't hide her true self and continues to seek the Lord to reveal more and more of her true identity in Him. I love the way she takes care of my Oma, with so much patience and love. She goes the extra mile to give my Oma the best possible quality of life, despite her dementia; she gets her to laugh often and try new things." Monica had told me about practicing the German song, "Gott ist die Liebe" (God is Love) with her mother using tambourines to present at Evelyn's family engagement party. The feasts of the Lord, Sabbaths and new moons don't pass by unnoticed in this household. The Lord's timelines and sea-

worship leaders. But it also starts with the congregation.

We ALL need to have our eyes and arms open for newcomers. And we need to MEAN IT.

We need our leadership to make a point of reaching out to newcomers.

We need to put aside our personal agenda of talking with all our familiar friends--and we need to make that awkward first-contact. "Hello, I don't think we've officially met! My name is Claire. Have you visited our church before?"

*If any of this resonated with your heart and you have the gift of hospitality--then let me know--we need you for an amazing, and non-time-consuming, position!

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sons are important and celebrated with ears tuned in to hear what the Lord is saying in this hour. Monica says "We live our lives around the Lord's timetable". Dance has many out workings in Monica's life and continues to surface, not only as an ongoing expression of her worship but as an enjoyable pastime. Currently Monica is involved in Jewish folk dance and another group that focuses on international folkdances.

Robert noted this of his wife: "Monica is one of my heroes. She is quick to put into practice what she believes and learns to be true. Her tenacious perseverance make it almost impossible to give up; overcoming obstacles and difficulties instead!"

One of the first HCF families (even before the amalgamation with Family of God), the DiFrancescos were missed when nine years ago the Lord led them to move to Huron Park where they lived in community with Return Ministries. It was a blessing for us when the Lord released them to come back to Hamilton a year ago and settled them back in our midst. Community living was a good fit for this wonderfully unique couple and this again was reflected in how I felt loved and felt welcomed in our afternoon together. As usual, this newsletter gives too little space to share it all...I encourage you to seek out this beautiful lady and experience the face of love for yourself! 🍷

Leaders Corner

by Claire Dam

If you've ever visited a new church you'll remember the anxiety and awkwardness you felt when you tried to go in, but went to the wrong doors. Or the shameful feelings once you were inside and were either ignored or descended-upon by greeters and people with name-tags just doing their duty. You fumbled through the service making eye contact with those in the congregation who are compelled to completely turn around in their seat and look at all the faces behind them. (What are these people looking for exactly?) And when it was time to leave you saw the eager faces of people trying to will you to return, or perhaps just a blur of faces as you bee-lined for the door.

Yikes. It's scary. There are a lot of feelings: hopes and fears and wounds and questions when you try out a new church.

So let's say you return to that same church again the next week? What made you want to return? And over the coming weeks what makes you want to stay?

There was a really cool exposè article recently written by a local guy/blogger, Chad Tomlinson, who visited 40 churches in the



“ADORATION” by David Bowman

When someone asks me, “How long have you been doing art?” to me it’s like being asked “How long have you been breathing?” Ever since I can remember, I have loved to draw. Since then, I’ve always found great satisfaction in creating. I believe it’s one of those traits we inherit from God. To me, it’s one of the most exciting things: to be inspired with an idea and then, little by little, turn that idea into something tangible and real. Even more exciting is when that tangible thing you’ve created has the potential to uplift and inspire others. That’s really when you feel God’s hand moving through you.

Being a Christian all my life, I decided to try my hand at depicting the most important person in my life, Jesus Christ. I wanted to portray Him in a way that was real, genuine, true to His character. For me, that would mean showing Him with different expressions depending on the situation He was in. I see Jesus smiling and laughing spontaneously. I see Him calming a child in His arms. I see Him intently concerned with whomever He is with, looking deep into their eyes, always focusing on their needs first. Jesus Christ is not a one-dimensional being, stoic and removed in appearance. His immense love would be shown in a variety of expression!

Thus, my Expressions of Christ series. Each piece, drawn in pastels, has a simple, one word title that expresses the emotion of that piece. I want the viewer to be able to relate that emotion to his/her own experience and relationship with the Savior. I pray these images can help bring His peace and encouragement to your life. View more of David’s art at: <http://davidbowmanart.com/> 

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FEBRUARY 2015						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Community Sunday 10 am	2 Prayer for Israel and The Jewish Community 7 pm	3 Prayer for Government 7 pm	4 Kid's Prayer 4pm	5 Corporate Prayer 10 am Preparedness Prayer 1-2 pm Band of Brothers 7 pm	6 Worship With The Word 7 pm	7
8 Community Sunday 10 am	9 Prayer for Israel and The Jewish Community 7 pm	10 Prayer for Government 7 pm	11 Kid's Prayer 4pm	12 Corporate Prayer 10 am Preparedness Prayer 1-2 pm Band of Brothers 7 pm	13 Worship With The Word 7 pm	14
15 Community Sunday 10 am	16 Prayer for Israel and The Jewish Community 7 pm	17 Prayer for Government 7 pm	18 Kid's Prayer 4pm Fire By Night 7pm	19 Corporate Prayer 10 am Preparedness Prayer 1-2 pm Band of Brothers 7 pm	20 Worship With The Word 7 pm	21
22 Community Sunday 10 am	23 Prayer for Israel and The Jewish Community 7 pm	24 Prayer for Government 7 pm	25 Kid's Prayer 4pm	26 Corporate Prayer 10 am Preparedness Prayer 1-2 pm Band of Brothers 7 pm	27 Worship With The Word 7 pm	28 Prayer Building  Sanctuary 