



Mission News

Mission Activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches

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Burnaby Reading Room A Christian Resource Centre



December 22, 2016



It's one of those rare nights where the snow is still somewhat thick and white on the ground, untouched by the proverbial BC rain. We are all crowded into a cozy, well-lit room a few blocks from Metrotown, warming ourselves with hot chocolate and enjoying each other's company. Just having returned from a very successful carolling venture at a seniors' home and down by the Metrotown skytrain station, we are all in high spirits.

In one corner, bundled up in winter gear and half-asleep, sits our youngest recruit—our candy-and-pamphlets distributor. On the other side of the room, a man stands at the ready to snap a photo when he is poked in the back by an opening door. A curious head peeks out from behind to survey the damage, and both burst out in laughter. The room is full of chatter and good noise. "This is what the Reading Room should always be like," someone comments.

Who are we?

The Reading Room is a Christian resource centre on 5272 Grimmer Street in Burnaby, Vancouver. It is an initiative of the Canadian Reformed Churches, primarily Willoughby Heights, with Aldergrove and Chilliwack churches as supporting churches. A number of our volunteers also come from the Cloverdale and Surrey Maranatha churches. Run entirely by volunteers, we depend on their availability for our hours of operation - and what a dedicated little crowd it has been! We are open most of the days of the week, generally in the afternoons, and alongside coffee and tea we offer literature and conversation about Christianity and the Reformed faith to the broader community.



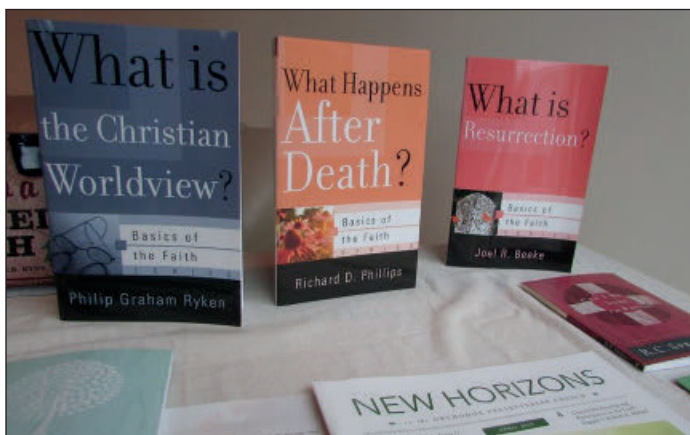


Burnaby doesn't exactly represent the average BC CanReffer's stomping ground. Additionally, for many volunteers a trip out to Vancouver takes up a considerable amount of time. Judging by volunteer responses, however, and their consistent reliability, many have found the experience of stepping out of their comfort zone (or perhaps even letting go of the whole idea of a "comfort zone") completely worthwhile.



Bible Study

In October of 2012, we held our first Bible study at the home of a student and soon moved more permanently to the home of Stephen and Rachel Kooiman, members of the Surrey, Maranatha congregation. Quite soon, we attempted to hang up posters at some of the post-secondary institutions our Bible study members were attending, and we handed out flyers and business cards to personal connections and at a carolling evening in the Bible study neighbourhood. Bible studies and subsequent projects were also advertised in the Burnaby Now, the local newspaper. The number of Bible study attendants varied. Over the years,



In 2012, following the recommendations of a commission which had been set up to look for outreach possibilities in the Vancouver area, the churches of Aldergrove and Willoughby Heights decided to start a project in Burnaby. Burnaby boasts a number of institutes of higher learning, including several universities and colleges. There is also a high percentage of immigrants, as in most of Vancouver. The initial plan had been to start a church plant, but because there was not enough financial support it was decided to begin with a Bible Study and to expand from there wherever the LORD would grant more opportunities.





we had about five or six regular guests outside of Canadian Reformed churches, and some guests who came for a short time-span or just once. At the moment, our Bible study consists of a core group of six.

Gospel Hour

In September 2013, we started Sunday Gospel Hour in the communal hall of a

business close to a major road in Burnaby. The Gospel Hour functioned like a church service, except that ministers had the flexibility to explain aspects of the service or the sermon to newcomers. Over the one-and-a-half years that the Gospel Hour took place, we saw fewer guests than at the Bible study, and several of them one-time. However, this was certainly a good time of fellowship for the families that were involved. After the service, we would always end with a potluck dinner.

In 2015 the Gospel Hour was discontinued due to a lack of availability of ministers for preaching. At this time, we were transitioning over into the Reading Room, which would be located in a different area of Burnaby. This was also when Chilliwack joined us as a supporting church. In March a very good deal for a room was found on Grimmer Street, a few minutes from Metrotown, the major shopping mall in Burnaby. Grimmer Street itself is in the middle of a residential area, which is in some parts still being developed. Across the road there is a seniors' residence which many of our volunteers have had the opportunity to visit during the times that we have gone carolling in the neighbourhood.

The Reading Room

The Reading Room itself is designed to be a warm and welcoming place, and many of our guests have commented that they really enjoyed that aspect. Instead of giving a description of the interior, I will let the photos do the talking, and would encourage you to visit and see for yourselves. The space is ideal for Bible studies, browsing and impromptu conversations, movie and games nights, and, of course, for warming up and debriefing after a night of caroling.

Visitors at the Reading Room have been many and varied. The numbers also vary per day and week. There

are days when volunteers receive no visitors, and then there are days that three or four show up; in most cases, they stick around for a long while to chat and read. Volunteers at the Reading Room are encouraged to record visits, so that the other volunteers can be prepared for returning visitors. We have had interesting discussions with men and women

of various Christian and sectarian backgrounds, and on occasion with a Buddhist and a Muslim. Some volunteers even actively engage passersby in conversation outside the Reading Room, while others make a point of getting to know the neighbours.

In the past, we have had movie nights and a games night at the Reading Room. Our Bible study also continues there every Wednesday evening at 8:00. Having made our way through the Gift of Heaven course, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Belgic Confession, we have decided to start over again with the first - an extensive course that covers many aspects of the Old and New Testaments and Christian living. When it comes to advertising and getting guests for our events, we still have much to learn. We have noticed time and again, however, that nothing beats personal contacts - even in this digital age. In light of this, we have found that we can never have enough volunteers helping us out at the





Reading Room, behind the scenes, or spreading the word at their campuses, jobs, and wherever in Burnaby some of our Canadian Reformed brothers and sisters may find themselves, whether permanently or temporarily.

What are our plans?

With the acceptance of a call by Rev. Souman to Australia, we have lost a key figure in the Burnaby project. But among the volunteers, it was decided that the Reading Room ought to continue, and that there is great potential to witness in the Metrotown area. Our night out carolling affirmed this, as many passersby at the skytrain station stopped and showed interest, and received information about the Reading Room. One of the greatest challenges we face is to decide where and how to spend our limited energies. Most of us have little experience with organized outreach work, and up until now, we have largely depended on the creativity of the volunteers themselves. Not only are we looking for more volunteers, we are also looking for creative new ways to reach out into the community, and the means to do so. In December 2016, we met with all of the volunteers to organize into committees so that we could continue to run the Reading Room. It is expected that with a sharing of obligations, less pressure will fall on any one individual, and the Reading Room will more visibly become the project of the volunteers, not of one leader. We do plan to call an evangelist sooner or later, but until the time and funds for that arrive, the LORD willing, we will continue our efforts to establish a Reformed Christian presence in the area through the Reading Room, and to bring the truth of the Gospel to the people of Burnaby!

How can you help?

Volunteering for the Reading Room project can be very rewarding and does not have to be time-consuming. The more the merrier, many hands make light work, and all that. . . .

Here are some of the ways in which you can help:

- As with any evangelism project, by praying for the volunteers and the efforts to reach out to the people of Burnaby - pray that God will open hearts and make people willing to receive the gospel.
- Volunteering your time, either at the Reading Room, behind the scenes on one of the committees, at one-time events such as caroling or special holidays, or by advertising at your school or workplace (if in Burnaby).
- By giving us advice or suggestions if you yourself have experience with outreach work.

Don't hesitate to contact the Reading Room at
info@burnabyreadingroom.info
 if you can think of ways to help us out!

*In Christ,
 Your brothers and sisters at the
 Burnaby Reading Room*

