

## **December 2010 Reporting: U of T Campus Ministry**

**Submitted by Brian Walsh**

A glimpse into our ministry can be found online at two places:

First, our ministry website [<http://crc.sa.utoronto.ca/>] has all of the weekly emails that we send to the Graduate Christian Fellowship and Wine Before Breakfast communities. These emails give a very good glimpse into what we have been doing.

Second, a lot of stuff that comes out of the Wine Before Breakfast community ends up at [www.empireremixed.com](http://www.empireremixed.com). Specifically, you might find the following entries instructive:

1. Joe Abbey-Colborne's piece on the beatitudes in our current church culture – this was the conclusion to Joe's sermon at WBB on October 5. It attracted a lot of cyber-attention, as well as being a profound word at WBB that morning.

2. My piece on the Calvin College cancellation of "The New Pornographers" show this semester. I decided to take my letter to President Byker and make it public. This also generated a lot of activity on the site.

3. My recent piece on the move from relevance to resonance in liturgy. This piece arises directly out of WBB and gives voice to the kind of aesthetic/liturgical sensitivities we have developed in that community.

4. The pieces we've posted on Advent – including WBB Advent sermons.

Perhaps most important, however, is the following testimonies from two women who have been deeply involved with Graduate Christian Fellowship over the last number of years.

### **Some Reflections on Graduate Christian Fellowship at the University of Toronto by Mari Jørstad**

I think of GCF as a community of people with whom I share significant similarities, but also significant differences, and both of these aspects of the community are important. The most obvious similarity between members of the GCF community is that most people would, in some way or another, self-identify as both Christians and intellectuals. As such, GCF is a place where being a Christian academic is normal, where I can explore my academic pursuits in light of my faith and my faith in the light of my academic pursuits, and where I have met friends who are in life-situations similar to my own, facing similar challenges and asking similar questions. This is satisfying, challenging and comforting, and to some extent explains why GCF is first and foremost for me a place of safety. Add to this the leadership of Geoff and Sara, the graciousness of the other GCF members, and the somewhat more intangible ethos of the group, GCF has become to me a kind of home, a lifeline to the church, and a way of connecting the many different pieces and trajectories of my life.

But GCF is also a place where differences between members are welcomed and explored. One of the most helpful and challenging aspects of GCF is the practice of telling each other our stories. I have been asked to tell my story at GCF twice, and this has been extremely helpful for sorting out my hopes and dreams for the future, for reflecting on the place of Christian community and church in my life, and for sharing about how I relate to God, especially in times of frustration and disappointment. Hearing other people's stories has allowed me to engage with opinions and views very different from my own, in a context that is not a discussion or debate, but a sharing of personal narratives by people whom I care about. It is often difficult to fruitfully share differences.

I believe that there is an underlying commitment to being a community at GCF that reorients such discussions. The sharing of stories builds on an understanding of 'being in it together', or of being a make-shift sort of family, and differences of opinion are therefore secondary in importance to taking good care of each other. Within this context of safety I have gained a greater understand and respect for people whose opinions are very different from my own, whose faith is expressed in ways that might, in other contexts, feel alienating, and have given me a picture of what open and accepting sharing of thoughts might look like. This has not only been rewarding, but also gives me hope for the potential of what Christian communities can be. I am deeply grateful for the support of the GCF community, and I believe my time with GCF will continue to shape my life and how I see myself for years to come.

**Graduate Christian Fellowship at U of T: A Testimony  
by Michelle Hoffman**

The GCF community has meant a lot to me over the 6 years I've been attending and participating. The main thing that strikes me, on thinking it over, is how welcome I have felt at GCF. Yes, I've brought soup and bread and dessert many times. But more often, I've shown up tired and hungry and empty-handed at the end of a long day, feeling a bit sheepish because I've brought nothing or because I haven't stopped by in awhile, and inevitably I've been received warmly, generously, and unreservedly. Sometimes I just pop in for a little bit, sometimes I eat and run, and this has not diminished my sense of welcome one bit. It seems to me that this kind of welcome is a rare find.

I shared with the group earlier this year that because of its open-hearted welcome, GCF has sometimes remained my lifeline to the Church through tough times. Sometimes, when my heart feels dead or desperate, I've found sustenance in the group's prayers, in the food I've been offered, in the sense of peace that that basement office seems infused with on Thursday nights, in the hopefulness that runs through the conversation, or in the remarkable willingness of people to accept me for who I am, even when I'm tired, hungry, and stressed. I go there seeking faith, or hope, or friends, or just rest.