

Volunteer at the Olympics? In a heartbeat!

by Madeline Honderich

Most of us participated in the Olympics from the comfort of our armchairs. Madeline and Barb answered the call for volunteers to share the Gospel, experiencing the event up close and personal.

WHEN THE CALL WENT OUT LAST NOVEMBER for volunteers needed at Trinity Lutheran Church in Richmond, B.C., it took five seconds to say “YES!!—I’d love to do that!”

After contacting Don Hindle, Director of Parish Services at Trinity, to find out their needs, it became even more exciting, so I coerced my friend Barb Berg of Cambridge, Ontario, to share this opportunity.

It suited both of us to go out early, thereby being able to help with Trinity’s set-up. We loved the sense of excitement when we walked into the church. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming. Our first job was putting sand into milk jugs. The next shift of volunteers placed them along the driveway and put coloured lights inside. At night it was very pretty, eye-catching and relaxing all at the same time. Our sand-work completed, someone suggested we go sightseeing to become familiar with the area. Off we went!

Trinity is located directly across the street from the O-Zone. This was a hospitality area and the speed-skating media centre—a popular and busy spot. It included the 63-acre Minoru Park with grandstands, bandshells, ice rink, tents with food, etc., and the cultural area—the museum, art gallery, library, city hall and a huge, beautifully coloured ice sculpture. After the Games started everyone had to go through security to every venue, including the O-Zone. To say the least the line-ups were blocks long—patience was a virtue.

The next day we visited Whistler, where many of the events would take place. What a beautiful setting for the

Winter Olympics. Vancouver can be very proud to have been chosen for the 2010 Games. Wish I were younger—I would have loved to try the luge, skeleton, bobsleigh or slalom. Any other takers?!

Back to work in the kitchen next day, and lots of fun if you enjoy baking cookies, muffins, strudel, and making

turkey and egg-salad sandwiches. A very well-organized Judy had everything figured out. She and Joan (both from Trinity) helped us get our act together. We were making these items for the volunteers and anyone who came in from the street or the church to watch the Olympics on a HUGE screen located in a very large gym. There was always hot chocolate, coffee or tea available, as sometimes the weather was not something to be desired

and everyone needed that warmth!!

Another day we were blessed to have tickets for the men’s 5,000m speed-skating event at the Richmond Oval. This is truly an outstanding building, holding more than 8,000 during the Olympics and situated on the banks of the Fraser River. Because the line-ups were so long we had ample time to chat with others. Witnessing comes in many different forms, we found, and people were quite surprised that we would pay our own way out there just to volunteer for a church. They were pleased to receive some of the “More Than Gold 2010” pins Trinity was handing out. We also had opportunity to share the story of Peter Schiemann since we were wearing our Mountie pins (pins honouring four Alberta RCMP officers, including Peter Schiemann, killed in the line of duty).

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Madeline Honderich and Barb Berg on the right.

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On a crowded bus, Barbara was privileged to sit beside a young Chinese man who had moved to Canada three months earlier. She told him about the ESL program and Chinese congregation at Trinity. She had about six bus stops to get her point across. He promised to check it out.

At the end of Rev. Dr. Steven Harold's Sunday sermon—theme: "You Raise Me Up (On Eagles' Wings)"—there were very few dry eyes in the congregation. He used a picture of a baby eagle being pushed out of its nest when the parents thought it was time—but a parent would fly underneath the baby and catch it on his or her wings until it could fly on its own. God might push us out of our "nests," too, but He will swoop down and catch us on His "wings" before we crash. How do we treat family and friends with our relationship with God? Do we catch, mentor and help them along life's journey? You can probably fill in a lot of the sermon from there. It was very moving to sing "On Eagles' Wings" at the conclusion of the sermon. Concordia University College Choir from Edmonton also treated us to four anthems. This was just a preview of what the evening had in store as the choir presented a wonderful program consisting of many genres of music. It was most enjoyable, and again the public was invited. The free parking lot was a draw as well.

In the church foyer were several tables with books, information, trading pins, helpful tracts, etc., which anyone was invited to pick up. This was our hostess job on Sunday. We met some of the more than 400 volunteers during the course of the week who truly came from all

over—Connecticut, Massachusetts, Iowa, Utah, Nebraska, Las Vegas, and many more areas. There was also a group of about 20 youth from Concordia University choir who, for several days and evenings, helped an international team from Fusion Canada entertain out on the front lawn, pulling the public in to do face and finger painting, exercising, making balloon creatures, walking on stilts and many other fun activities. Some also posed mute for long periods of time—one would think they were mannequins. There were always hotdogs and beverages offered.

We cannot forget our wonderful hosts (Barb was billeted several miles northeast of the church and I was billeted southeast) who got up from their warm beds for us, 6 a.m. at the latest and many mornings much earlier—to get us to where we had to be. Many thanks go out to them because it could have been a mattress on the gym floor!

When the fireworks went off in the O-Zone our last evening there, it was rather sad, and we certainly felt a bit downhearted knowing we were heading home early the next morning. As Barb said after we got home—"I wish I was still out there!" To which I responded, "Me, too. I was just getting started!"

Madeline Honderich is a member of St. Peter's Women's Guild, New Hamburg, Ontario.

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