

# ChristianWeek

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## Project gives dignity to society's "invisible"

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WINNIPEG, MB—Local artists and musicians are using their craft to inspire compassion for the oppressed and outcast.

A weeklong series of art exhibits, music, worship and public presentations from September 22–29 is dedicated to highlighting the "invisible dignity" of people ignored or looked down upon by society.

"I hope that more than anything else, the Invisible

Dignity Project will raise the awareness of what it means to 'love our neighbour,' and of the fact that God is head over heels in love every one of us, including those people we often tend to overlook," says local artist Gerald Folkerts, one of five artists featured in the exhibit.

Folkerts' latest series of paintings, "Head Over Heels," features the faces and feet of individuals often found on the periphery—a homeless man, a friend in the throes of breast cancer, a young nephew who died suddenly in his sleep.

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"We choose to ignore things that we're uncomfortable with," says Folkerts. But with art, he explains, especially large pieces of art, "you can't ignore it. It's there; you have to face it."

Nigerian-born artist Yisa Akinbolaji is planning to unveil a new collection of paintings created using a special etching technique. "I literally etch out the beauty that lies beneath with this technique," he says.

He describes his piece "Messiah is Watching" as "reflections of innocence amongst the unmistakable images of war and hatred that now dominate our planet."

"I am certain that God sees

it all and that his heart rejoices over the virtuous and breaks because of the violence and prejudice," says Akinbolaji.

### Ignite the passion

While the project aims to highlight the beauty and dignity of the oppressed, Folkerts says organizers are working hard to ensure the endeavour doesn't become "a one-time 'feel good' event."

"We are hoping and praying this event will ignite a passion and a conviction that we must look for ways to bring dignity to our neighbours, whatever their station in life may be," he says.

The project grew from discussions between Folkerts and Cornelius Buller, executive director of Urban Youth Adventures and formerly of the Salvation Army's Ethics Centre.

Stunned by horrific details he discovered while researching the issue of human trafficking, Buller organized the first day of prayer and fasting for its victims last year. It is estimated that 27 million persons are currently enslaved in various capacities around the world.

That event inspired this year's expanded project.

"Our imaginations are sources of inspired action, for both good and evil," says Buller. "Daily stories of horrific and unimaginable attacks against persons create shock, fright and anger, but we have been numbed through hearing of too many atrocities."

But, he says, art can inspire new hope by highlighting the "invisible dignity" of the oppressed.

"This is not about guilt," says Buller. "My hope is to inspire

vision and passionate action. Our eyes and hearts might be opened through art, music, poetry and prayer with fasting."

### Full slate of events

"Unveiling the mystery: the invisible dignity exhibition," opens at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery on September 22, and moves to the John Fairbank Memorial Library at Booth College on September 24. It features Winnipeg artist Ray Dirks, Jo Cooper, a metis artist from Quebec and Steve Prince, an African-American artist from Virginia, as well as Folkerts and Akinbolaji.

The artists plan to visit local schools to lead presentations and workshops on the theme of "Invisible Dignity." In the early new year students will have the chance to exhibit their own work on the topic.

Meanwhile, a worship celebration in word and art takes place September 23 at Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) with further public



"On the Road from Amangal"

presentations during the week at Booth College and CMU.

A day of prayer and fasting for victims of human trafficking takes place September 29 at 6:30 p.m. at North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church and will conclude with Breaking the Fast Benefit Concert featuring Steve Bell, Carolyn Arends, Bob Bennett, Hannah Taylor of

the Ladybug Foundation and Jamie McIntosh of International Justice Mission, an organization dedicated to rescuing victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression.

For a full calendar of events, visit [www.invisibledignity.org](http://www.invisibledignity.org). All events are free; a freewill offering will be collected at the benefit concert.

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