



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

Summer 2009

Thanks to You – a Year in Review

Our hearts are grateful to all of you friends and Compassionate Society members for your ongoing support. Allow us briefly to summarize a few of the achievements of our community and to give you a general outline of our costs. I am sure you would all agree that St John the Compassionate Mission provides a very large service to the community with a fraction of the costs of most social agencies.

Our budget to run the Mission is on average \$16,000.00 per month. From November 2008 to the end of March 2009, the Mission was open seven days a week, on certain days for over sixteen hours at a time. During these months we saw an increase to 4,301 visits, 2023 men and 428 women. The average number of meals served during the year is 2,500 per month. The kitchen, which has often had to rely on volunteer cooking management, has now been able to hire two cooks through a social fund.



Thank you for helping to build our community!

meals have now been set apart only for adults with children, and we are envisioning an increasing presence of such families among us, for this group is part of the working poor who, we believe, are not always well served. This change in scheduling is a big addition for us, since previously our meals program has always served mostly street people, predominantly men only. Our work with them, of course, continues; in the case of Wednesdays, we have replaced the evening meal with a lunch for them at noon. To serve both the street people and poor families we have an average of 120 volunteers who give over 2,100 hours per month of their labour and love to welcome and feed people in need.

Our **St John's Academy** for after-school tutoring, a pilot project with World Vision, is the only program of its kind in Canada so far. The Academy is completing its second year of operation, with twenty-nine graduating students, twelve volunteers, and two part-time staff.

The **OIKOS** program was born last year as a way to focus on giving families more support in times of crisis. We describe OIKOS as "a circle of care." It includes community mentors, two certified family therapists, a psychiatrist, and priests with pastoral experience. This is still in the beginning stages, but to date sixteen families in crisis have received help and support.

Our **office staff** has gone from a part-time book keeper to a full-time person in this position. As well, we continue to have a part-time office administrator. The heavier office workload has been a necessary evolution, both because of the growth of our programs and because we must try to keep up with the growing demands of the Canada Revenue Agency.

In the past year we have conducted fourteen retreats, for twelve to sixteen persons at a time, at **St Mary of Egypt Refuge**. This **retreat centre** is located in a 260-acre forest near Tweed, Ontario. St Mary of Egypt Refuge was originally purchased partially with the help of St John's Mission. It now comprises a home and a chapel, a swimming pool, and a family playground area.

This year we have again refocused on **reaching out to families** in our neighbourhood. Wednesday night



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Fishin' at St. Mary of Egypt Refuge

Building A Community,



Gordon Our Promo Man

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We have also this year inaugurated the **Lived Theology School**, an intern program of mission work in North America. The school will have room for six interns per year. For this endeavour, we have received broad interest, even from as far away as Russia.

On average, our Mission Director and others spend 228 hours a month in supportive, spiritual counselling. The greatest complaint in this area is that people do not have easier access to this service.

We have recently developed an **in-house audio/visual department**, and we are also able to produce all our promotional printed materials, usually at a fraction of the normal cost of out-sourcing.

St John's Bakery has gone from baking eighty loaves a month to 1200 a night times 5 days a week. We employ 16 people, and products are sold to over 35 outlets in the GTA and markets throughout Ontario.

Our **Thrift Store** has also expanded with the increase of three employed staff, as well as more volunteers. The pickups of donations have increased from once a month to twenty-four times per month.

The real story of the Mission's work, however, is not reflected only in numbers and statistics. It is reflected even more in the ongoing effect our work has on people. For example, Jeannie and her family have been involved at St John's since 1986! It is reflected in the quiet smile of Jeff, an extremely

shy man who brought his sister to meet us, and through whom we learned how the community had changed Jeff's whole life. It is reflected also in the hope that many people quietly and discreetly share with us, hope that they have received just by being welcomed and made useful. There is such a sense of purpose, achievement, and pride that many extraordinary human beings feel by being allowed into our community in order to give to others. It is impossible to account for these intangible realities statistically.

So often we think that what we need to do is to "help" people, give things to people, that people are in "need." The reality is that the people we serve have so much to give us and our mainstream "functional" society. Unfortunately, there are few places where they can

actually offer that gift of themselves. Yes, we have found housing and work for people. Yes, we have taught children English or math. Yes, we have taken people off welfare, fed people and clothed them. But honestly, these things are not the heart of the matter.

The real success story of the Mission is that it has become a place of immense human richness. It is a richness which much of our society lacks, a richness based in the many gifts offered by simple people who will never fit into statistics and will never be part of most social service reports. But because of them, our neighbourhood, our city, even our world, is a better place, and you and I are better people.

In order to live this vision, we do need your continuing support to keep our doors open, that we may feed and clothe people, keep the building warm, give all kinds of counseling and support to those who come, and offer them a true community to be a part of. Because of your support this miracle happens: the rediscovery of the incredible beauty and richness behind every person's face. The miracle where those who receive become the givers.

We need your on-going support in this vision that Jean Vanier saw when he visited us last June and said "This is the vision of St John the Compassionate. Compassion isn't just doing things for people, it's revealing to people: You're beautiful, you're a child of God, you have value" Jean Vanier.



The Thrift Store



Jeff, our very own Obama!



Sing along!

Thank You, Fr Roberto

One Heart At A Time

Do you have a year to give for a mission opportunity?



Blessing the school

Toronto houses a unique resource for anyone over the age of eighteen. The Lived Theology School – LTS – under the patronage of St Maria of Paris, is a house located in downtown Toronto, where interns experience a year of study mission, in both a theoretical and very practical way.

LTS has four pillars at the core of its intern program:

- regular study periods;
- hands-on practical experience at St John the Compassionate Mission;
- living a full liturgical life in the context of a parish and the mission;
- community life among interns.

The interns share an adequate, but simple, seven-bedroom house within walking distance of St John the Compassionate Mission.

LTS taps into twenty three years of experience living out mission work at St John the Compassionate Mission. All this provides a unique opportunity for people to really learn what mission could look like.

This work is understood not as a simple “let’s convert them,” or “handouts.” Rather, true mission work must engage the Church with the world, especially with people who are lost and suffering and poor.

We need to understand that we can only evangelize in vulnerability and that evangelization is not just a one-way street. We need to learn ways of doing mission work that flow out of our theology and our liturgy. This finally cannot be done simply by reading a book or in academic discussion detached from the reality of the lives of real people and situations.

At the same time we need to have our mission work rooted in a theological understanding and not in sentimentality. That is why LTS was born: to give an opportunity to “do theology”— live it, pray it and share it.

We need a place of sober reflection and living so that a solid Patristic and realistic understanding of mission can grow for this generation.

The aim of the Lived Theology School is not to encourage a replica of St John the Compassionate Mission. Each intern is encouraged to take what he or she learns and apply it creatively to whatever parish or life circumstances they might find themselves in the future. LTS receives applications throughout the year. If you want to know more, please consult the LTS website at www.livedtheologyschool.org or write to us at livedtheologyschool@yahoo.ca



The LTS house was blessed on May 9th by Fr Roberto, Fr Velichko and Fr Nikolai. The blessing was attended by a number of people and was followed by a festal meal. Sub-deacon Pawel gave a short talk about LTS based on his own experience of mission life at St John’s.

A (not so) quiet strength



Hilda with Mr. Lama

Few people in the course of St John the Compassionate's history have contributed more to the structure and smooth functioning of the Mission than Hilda Tzavaras.

Hilda became involved with the Mission when she served as its first Board of Directors president after the community came under the spiritual leadership of Metropolitan Nicholas. Over her years of service so far, her leadership has been broadly and deeply felt in the purchasing of the building next door, in the expansion of St John's Bakery, and in the development and expansion of St John's Thrift Store.

Hilda came to our Mission community from a very successful business career. Her heart was seeking a way to live the life of faith which was so central to her existence, while at the same time using her exceptional business skills to serve that faith. At the Mission her heart discovered what it was seeking.

One of her quiet achievements was the establishment of a real business office for the Mission. Another was and is her considerable influence in the development of the

Thrift Store, the income from which has increased from \$1,500 to over \$5,000 per month. Currently she also manages a staff of 30 Full time, part time & volunteer employees in our bakery.

We believe that her week probably has more hours than most people's (or perhaps she has discovered a way to clone herself!). Where does she get the energy to do all of these things? From her quiet faith in the Lord, and from a deep prayer life. The Lord has given her the grace, in the midst of all this activity, always to find time to listen to, and to reach out in help and counsel to, Mission people who need her.

This year Hilda received a cross to wear from the Monastery of St Silouan in France. It blesses and consecrates the mission work which she has so faithfully and graciously embraced. Hilda's contribution to the work of the Mission was also recognized by Metropolitan Nicholas last year through the award of a grammata (a formal diocesan award for outstanding work).

St. John's Academy – More than Educational Enrichment

We are almost near the end of the school year, a time for students to gauge their progress and reflect on their experiences. We recently asked one of our students, Jennie, what this program has meant to her. Jennie has been attending **St. John's Academy** since its inception in 2007. She lives with her mother (an immigrant from Vietnam) and two younger sisters. Without hesitating, Jennie remarked that her grades have improved (in fact she has gone from a C to an A in math and a C to B in English!). She was very happy about this. What she was also grateful for was the chance to make new friends and deepen friendships with existing friends. She also noted that it is easier for her to talk with her teachers at school now, that she has become more polite towards her mom and has learnt "to keep trying when things are difficult". What a wonderful life lesson!

While we continue to see improvement in our students' grades through **St. John's Academy**, we also see the broader impact that this program has on their lives. As a result of demand, this year we will be extending the program through the summer. If you or anyone you know would be interested in volunteering as an English or math mentor, please contact the Program Coordinator: Sharon Helleman at 416 833-1997.

Written by: Lara Joannou, Children's and Youth Program Director



Jennie (center) with her friends

St. John the Compassionate Mission

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