



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2010



New Resource for Families



What do you get when you cross a hard-working dad with a hard-working mom and land them in the city of Toronto? Often, you'll get a family struggling to get by. This riddle is no joke. A lot of times, two working parents is best-case scenario. Unfortunately not all of our families have two parents, or even one earner.

St. John's recognizes a growing need in families of the GTA, that if you are trying to support a family, there is never enough money to go around. And so, earlier this year, St. John's Mission started a food resource for families of the GTA, recently christened Food for Families (FfF). To qualify, families need to consist of at least one parent and at least one child under 18 living in the household. They do not need to be on social assistance.

Since beginning FfF in winter 2010, we have seen over 70 families. About 28 of those come on a regular basis. On average we see 16 families per week; counting all members of those families, we are helping about 52 people weekly. FfF operates every Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 - 4:00. Families may come alternating weeks, which is twice as often as many other food resource programs in the city (once per month).

Our aim is to provide actual food to our families. You: "Actual food?" Me: Yes. I say "actual" to contrast with processed, engineered goods that come in boxes and crinkly wrappers. I'm talking about fruits and vegetables, potatoes, rice, beans, flour, oil, and when things are going really well, milk, eggs and cheese - those are happy days! So often, food banks only dole out products imitating food.

That's the "what". The "how" is also planned with the well-being of our families in mind. Before we open, volunteers determine what will be given, based on what donations have come in that week. Food is then laid out, and when the families come, they shop. In other food resource programs, bags are filled according to the number in the household. And it goes something like, "2 large juices, 1 large pasta sauce, 2 small cans vegetables OR fresh vegetables if available..." So a lot of times people don't get any say in the food they receive. Although we have very few volunteers running the program, we decided to give this much choice to our families, so they aren't given things they can't use, and can have things they will use. Maybe only a very skilled chef would be equipped to make a meal out of random pickings



from a food bank.

Being able to choose one's own real groceries probably sounds about like how you shop too. I can think of several ways this benefits these folks. Firstly, allowing someone choice and control over what they eat is dignifying and respectful. Secondly, it allows them to cook the way they are accustomed. It doesn't take away the need for them to spend time making the meal, which, depending on how you look at it, is a very good thing. And it's real food, which will nourish them and their children.

The biggest and easiest way you personally can help St. John's Food for Families resource is to provide us with food **regularly**.

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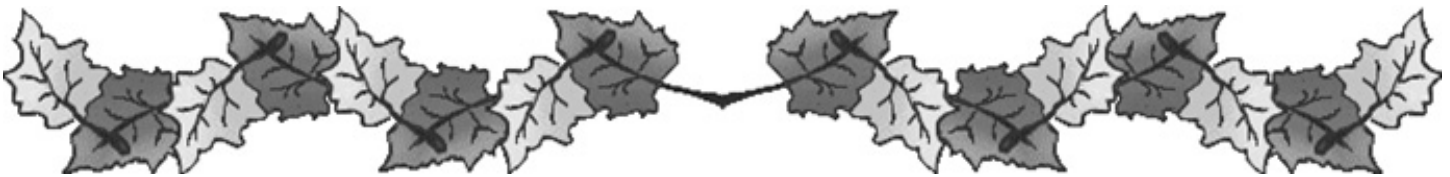
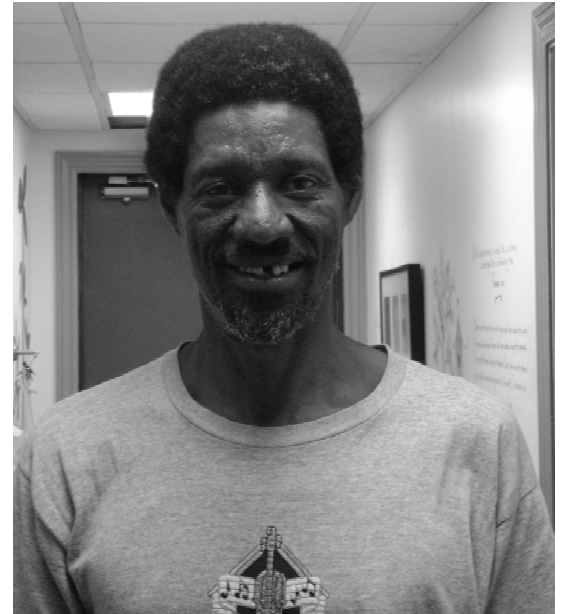
Story of a Handyman

Let me start by telling you a little bit about myself...

Being homeless, I used to live under a bridge at the Don Valley Pkwy and Dundas St. overpass in 2004. I used to come to St John's Mission for meals, which I greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Now I volunteer at the same Mission. I am a Jack of all trades, or better known as a Handyman. I do lots of minor repairs at the Mission, landscaping – looking after the plants and flowers, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, serving meals, and cleaning up afterwards. Also, making sure the Mission is spick and span.

I really like working here, it is lots of fun helping out, meeting people and being able to give help back like they gave to me and is always a joy to meet new people. **Aubrey Clyde (Junior)**



St John's Academy Graduation Highlights



On July 6th we held our third annual St. John's Academy Graduation Dinner! We were treated to chicken pakora, samosas, spring rolls, salads, pizza and other delights prepared by the families of our students. Congratulations to Shoily and Katie, who won our award for best improvement in English (Shoily) and Math (Katie)! Congratulations also to Fahad and Meng. Fahad won the award for Motivation, and Meng for Best Attendance and Focus. A big thank you to World Vision and Groia for their support, as well as all of our tutors.

We have finished off a great year at St. John's Academy. We had 20 students through our program this year. Here are a few of our highlights from this year:

- 88% of our students have seen significant improvements in the English scores, developing both their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills.
- On average our students have seen a 7% increase in their English school grades, the equivalent of moving from a C to a B!
- This past school year one of our students improved her math grades by 23%!
- 40% of our students progressed over three grade levels on the standardized tests in Math.
- One of our students improved 4.7 grade levels!

There are more photos of our graduation dinner up on the St. John's Academy website. Please check them out at www.stjohnsacademy.ca. You will also find application forms for the 2010-11 school year on the website. Thanks! **Sharon Hellman**

The Poor - I am one of them

Two years ago I heard beautiful words, from my friends, about St. John the Compassionate Mission, about Father Roberto and his parish. I came to visit this place one day and I was touched by the simplicity and the hospitality - there are three doors to get to the Chapel, they are most of the time physically closed, but they seem open. Since then I try my best to come to St. Silouan almost every Sunday and during the week if there is service.

Coming just for the services was not enough though; the word Mission is even in the name of the Parish - St. Silouan the Athonite Mission - most probably not accidentally. Something was missing... I had the feeling I was not doing enough... being busy between work, family and Church, even if I got exhausted at the end of the day, paradoxically felt like laziness... it was a lot more to be discovered. I was missing out the life at the Mission - eating in the trapezia every Sunday with the group of St. Silouan and knowing that during the week the needy were also coming there to eat in the same place, a part of me wanted to meet them.

More than a year ago the LTS program was put together and I remember the invitation that Father Roberto made: "Do you have a year to give?" I wished very much I could join the program ... At the end of the spring of this year things changed in a way that allowed me to fulfill my wish - today I am part of this program. I cannot afford one full year because of the responsibilities I have with my family but I am very glad I can be here every day for the summer at least. I do not know where and when two months just disappeared..., I only have one month to go... I already miss the Mission...

The Mission is like a bee hive. The kitchen is always full of people, preparing, serving the food or washing the dishes, the trapezia gets full as well during meals, the hallway is most of the time jammed with people coming and going. Father Roberto's office is busy also with meetings after meetings. Downstairs is a bit quieter but not on Wednesdays when we have the food bank for families. The quietest place at the Mission remains the Chapel.

At the Mission you have two options: you ask for something to do and/or you talk, listen to people. In the beginning it was easier for me to do something instead of

talking to someone but I was still missing what I was looking for and did not know exactly what... until I sit at the table with strangers one day during lunch. Hearing their stories, listening to these people I never met in my life I felt like I knew them already, like they were part of me, like I was connected to them already before that time. I had this feeling before, I remember one winter day when I was feeling very low and walked through the streets alone..., I remember how I could identify myself with each one of the beggars and I talked to them, I was one of them, I had the very deep feeling I was at home on the streets with these people and I did not want to return to my actual home. These were the people who were able to see me, whom I was able to connect with.

Now I discover I am one of them all the time, whether I feel low or just fine. Where there is vulnerability, where people do not wear masks, there the connection with the other is possible.



I asked myself in the beginning what can I do for the poor and needy, how can I help them; I was feeling guilty for not being able to do much... now I am a bit more at peace. There is nothing to be fixed; it is not me who can/should fix anything anyway.

Whenever I try to give myself and my heart to the other, whenever I try to forget about myself and

about what I want or like, I discover I do not miss anything anymore and then I find peace. There is still so much to learn about how to love and for that I need all my life...I do not love - I only try to love; I do not give myself - I only try to give my heart...

I am going to miss the Mission, I am going to miss the people and all the friends I made. I will still come once in a while. I will be at the Parish, I will be exactly in the same place still I will be so far away from what the Mission life is. There is a gap between the Parish and the Mission but there is also a bridge. I am very glad I did cross this bridge, even if it was for a short period of time.

I already miss sitting at the table with the poor, broken, homeless, I miss the vulnerability, I miss the union between souls, the communion that lasts forever, the very deep place where we can all meet and become one but I have hope: I know I can still be at the Mission even if I am not at the Mission, if I do, wherever I am, what I learned here. **Aida Albu**

Count your Blessings!

A few years ago, I heard about a place called St John the Compassionate from one of the priests and sisterhood from the church I attend. This church is called St Nectarios Church located in Toronto.

Since then, I felt drawn to visit this place. After speaking to Fr peter and his wife Presbyteria, I was interested in volunteering in the soup kitchen at St John the Compassionate and thought that this would be a beneficial experience.

My first day arriving at St John the Compassionate was an opportunity to become acquainted with the diversely busy community. I met a few bakers from the bakery and a volunteer co-ordinator who gladly accepted my offer to volunteer.

This first official volunteer day was such a great day that I felt like returning to visit soon. During my first day, I had a tour of the beautiful Orthodox Church, met Fr Roberto and other employees and volunteers, and I had a chance to offer my volunteer services in the soup kitchen. I was really taken aback by the gratitude of the sense of belonging. I must of heard at least 3 thank yous during lunch! Not to mention, tea time and the beautiful array of frescos of orthodox icons all over the walls. Over the last month, I've met so many interesting people who I feel are very talented and in general have a lot to offer to a community. Artists, iconographer, a jack of all traits, generous volunteers, and a priest who really loves his job are a few of the many unforgettable people here.

I really feel grateful to have discovered such a safe heaven where there are generous and kindly talented souls to work and serve. **Vicky**



Photos from the Summer of 2010



July 31st BBQ

Elizabeth

July 31st BBQ

In All Things Give Thanks

A 4-year-old boy was asked to return thanks for Thanksgiving dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, brother, sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles.

Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip. Then he paused, and everyone waited -- and waited.

After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked,

"If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?"

Never to be Forgotten

I don't know what to say about Myke, he was my friend, and now he is gone. My 1st week of the mission I was sitting with Father Roberto, who pointed over to a man sitting in a motorized wheelchair in the back of the church hall, "go find out his story". As I walked over, I admit I was completely intimidated and had no idea what to say. "Hi I'm Mike", "Hey I'm Myke too". This was the first experience of Myke. I sat with him most of the times he came. He was living at Bridgepoint Health Ctr. where he was receiving dialysis, not sure of the cause; had calcification of his bones that showed through to his skin, his fingers bent and unusable, half of his digits fallen off, his hand curled in, his skin looking leprous, and missing a leg from a complication with dialysis. Beneath this frail broken body, this daunting outer shell was eyes of fire, eyes that showed unbridled emotion and concern for the person talking, a pain but also dignity.



He would come for lunch as it would be the only meal of the day, he couldn't keep down hospital food, taken right after his painkillers and medical marijuana (a fact he was proud of) which made him ravenously hungry. His favourite food was the olive cilantro loaf from our bakery. He was an elder of the street, people came to him almost to receive his blessing; countless people told me they would not have survived their first nights on the street or tent city without him. He had been a giant of a man, "Moose" his nickname. Young, 30's or 40's, I never knew for sure. He had been taken from his German parents, and put into a Jewish foster family; talk about screwed up identity, he would say, "ran away, been in a circus, learned fire blowing, and a good party trick. Experienced life the good and the bad, taking the latter and letting it run off."

He was forgotten by the hospital system, everything families usually do was forgotten, they would only give him smocks, so he wore long dirtied clothes everywhere, he couldn't even get into a Laundromat

because of his wheelchair. I would visit him in the hospital regularly; and talk about music, the street, and life. My best memory will be an epic 3 hour journey through the city, a week before Christmas, to see Avatar for his birthday. This is a memory I will hold forever.

Myke got an apartment and out of the confines of the hospital. I went and visited him a few times, but it was far out of my way. However I also got to see him in his turf, in Kensington Market where he grew up, and see how much people remembered him. For 2 months I didn't see him, life happened, though this is a partially an excuse, I didn't want to deal with the pain that seeing

him brought up. The next time I saw him he was lying in a casket. He quit treatment, dying with one friend beside him; he couldn't live any longer in the prison that was his life. I could have been there; I had planned to visit him 5 days earlier and had put it off for a week. I should have, could have, and this guilt kills me. I am lost, regret hits me. A part of me has died with him, something I don't think I will ever be able to relive, only be grateful that I did live it.

Life does not seem fair that Myke suffered as much as he did, or that a person as lively as Myke was reduced to a wheelchair. If you asked me why was I friends with Myke, I have no answer for you. But for some reason there was a connection, we needed to be friends, we needed to be together. God put him in that room for me on that fateful day and me in the room for him. God's ways are too terrible, too painful, and unfathomable for me to know them. You sometimes can only just grab on, and get taken for a ride, in this reckless journey by His burning love. Every one of us has had a person that we have accompanied personally, that have deeply affected us, that defines our life at the mission. Myke has been that person for me.

**Michael Luciuk, LTS Student,
livedtheologyschool.org**

Chef a la Mediterranean

After many years I'd began to think I'd seen most aspects of the food service industry but St John's is turning out to be a brand new and exciting experience, giving new meaning to the words "food" and "service". Part simple catering, part Iron Chef, part nail-biting, and spur of the moment improvisation. Don't have what you need? Pray - then create from inspiration.

My cooking background is strongly Mediterranean, influenced by my Greek background and experience cooking in Greece. My working partner; Ed's experience is mostly pub kitchen. Our kitchen is giving him an excellent opportunity to expand his cooking repertoire. He, on the other hand, knows more about typical North American dishes than I do.

We work together daily to create a full course menu, Wednesday through Saturday, to feed a flexible customer base. Wednesday evenings we also offer a full course family dinner with an emphasis on child-friendly food choices. We try to emphasize healthy eating and also offer vegan dishes daily to accommodate both Orthodox Christians who may be fasting and others who are vegetarian.

In short, this position, which I chanced upon through a family member's efforts (another story, another day), is bringing me great pleasure and giving me wonderful opportunities for growth, both as a chef and a human being.

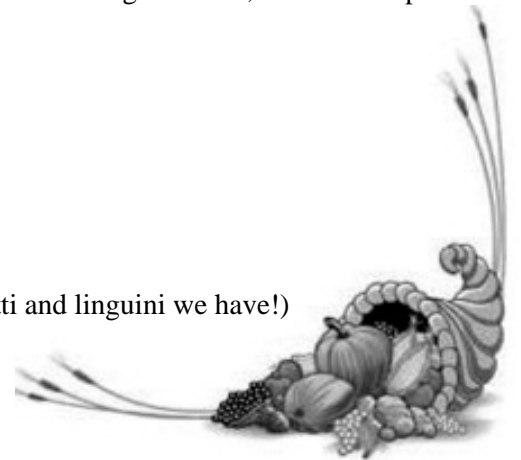
Linda Karounou-Van Voorthuizen



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Or once. We will accept whatever you give us that has not expired; but if you're looking for ideas, we strive to provide:

- apples, oranges, bananas, grapes, and other fruits
- tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers and other vegetables
- potatoes, onions, squash, carrots, etc
- milk, eggs, cheese, yogurt, other dairy products
- dry beans and pulse crops of all kinds
- vegetable or canola oil
- flour, sugar, oats, bread, salt, tea, coffee
- rice and grains of all kinds
- any pasta that is not long and thin (you should see how much spaghetti and linguini we have!)
- tomato sauces
- breakfast cereal
- baby food, diapers
- gift cards to grocery stores



We also really use consistent volunteers to run the program in a manner that is consistent with our vision and ethos. If you are able to volunteer your time to help run the program on Wednesday afternoons, please contact Naomi at stjohnandmaria@gmail.com to get information.

In the fall we hope to expand our Food for Families program into something of a Family Day. As supplying families with food is good but not the only way to help, we'd like to provide parents with skills that help in day-to-day life such as cooking and ESL classes, a family dinner around the table chez St. John's, socializing with other moms and dads, and an opportunity to seek individual assistance from St. John's. We'd also like to be able to provide wholesome activities for children, like story time, art, singing songs, and good old fashioned play time. If you are experienced in leading activities for children or have a useful skill you could teach parents, and would like to help us on Wednesdays, please contact Naomi and include your phone number at the email address above. Activity leaders will be required to have a criminal record check done prior. Bilingualism is an asset.

Naomi Funk, LTS Student, livedtheologyschool.org

St. John the Compassionate Mission

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