

Job - the Long-Suffering

Elizabeth is a beautiful, always properly dressed Hungarian woman in her late 50's. She is a regular at the Mission. Depending on the day, she is louder than at other times but she carries the cry that is in all of our hearts.

Elizabeth often spends her time literally shouting out the questions we all wish we could "Why do good people have to suffer? If God is good why does he allow this to happen? My poor mother she suffered so much, my poor brother he suffer so much, the poor guy why, why?"

"Why did Christ who was good have to die?" All day Elizabeth shouts these questions out loud. At times she is in tears, always she is very attentive to you and remembers little details that you shared with her months ago. She truly cares about the person who talks to her I have learned.

So all day Elizabeth shouts these questions only falling silent when in the Chapel praying with the rest of us. Often in front of her persistent questions I can only keep silent, like Job before the dreadful mystery of God's providence.

I recently introduced Elizabeth to a friend who is very knowledgeable of Orthodox/Catholic theology and with experience working with the poor. I thought he could be able to find words to help her. When Elizabeth opened her heart to him, with her cry, he just laughed. She was visibility confused by his response. I then understood that what we have been accustomed to, to see and accept and even revere, for the outside world was just foolishness. To the world and even educated people with respect Elizabeth is hard to understand but among us she is honourable, she carries the cry of all of us before God.



Christos Anesti!
Christos Voskres!

Families are Hurting the Most

The Mission has now a reputation for being a haven for street and under housed people in the city. Many of the folks being men, this group is divided between the “old-timers” as one of them described “you’re just a plain honest alcoholic” and these “new breed, tough and you don’t mess around of crack heads” What is maybe less known, but equally of importance, is the work the Mission does to reach out to families with children.

Every Wednesday night the space for dinner is reserved for families and children - a healthy dinner. Jeannie and Naomi, for example, spend time with visiting families helping to create a sense of belonging and dignity. It is not easy for families to have to come to a mission for supper. We also have a **family only food aid**. We give out canned foods but also fresh fruit and vegetables that are a rare staple in most food banks. We also have the St John’s Academy for students from grade 6 to 9. Most of these children are recent immigrants and we have the strong support of their parents in helping the children achieve their academic potential. This program is very successful thanks to Lara and Sharon. We offer week long camps at St Mary of Egypt Refuge and every first weekend of the month families can go to this beautiful place in the woods for rest and renewal. Every month children can bake in our Bakery, giving them a chance to experience what a real bakery looks like. They go home with the labour of their hands to share with their families. Once a month we have a movie night where kids get to see movies they would normally not be exposed to and are invited to discuss afterwards with some pizza.



We believe that families, and their children, are suffering the most from this economic crisis and by the burden poverty places on parents to carve out a living. Many have to work two jobs, or night shifts, and never get to see the children. Many struggle for basic needs. Unlike the political and visible poor e.g. homeless and drug addicts, it is families who often carry the greatest burden today in our society. As whole new neighbourhoods are rising around us bringing in the next two years a dramatic increase of working poor families to our doorstep we feel that what we have in place, prepares us well to meet this new challenge.

F.R.

St Xenia House - Housing vs Home

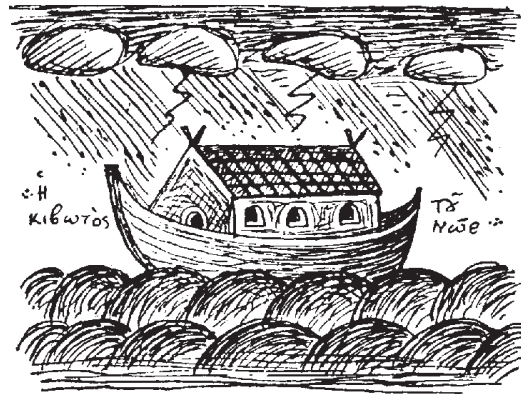
I just read in the Toronto Star that the City has funding for 1000 units of sustainable housing; the idea being to create units that those of low income can afford, and not have to worry about survival. If each of these units runs into even some of the problems that St. Xenia has had to deal with, I am scared for them. I know that most units will not have the level of support St. Xenia has. It will be a struggle just to keep these places from descending into hell. The last six months of St Xenia House have been a mix of hope, success and failure. We have had to deal with countless mechanical, interpersonal, and community problems. Dealing with a slow-moving bureaucracy, reluctant residents, and lack of time have presented a constant challenge. One would think that the thousands of people wanting housing would mean that we would fill the house in minutes; however, one room has consistently stayed vacant. This has come from countless individuals turning down the room. Perhaps it is a failure of what we envision for the house. If we’d wanted a rooming house, we could have filled it in a week; if we’d wanted a drug house, one day, if pets were allowed; a month. No community, maybe two. But we wanted a home. That vision consistently runs into a brick wall. But in all the darkness there is some light; a new resident enjoying the atmosphere and support of the home and one of our residents moving out to look after her grandchildren. As we pack up the few last things in her room, she hugs me and makes sure I know just how grateful she is. She will never forget St. Xenia’s.



Michael (LTS Intern)

Noah Visits St John's!

One of the "joys" of an older building is that things wear out. Very recently it was an elderly pipe that brings the main water supply into the building. And boy did it bring water into the building - a veritable flood into the basement! It took a while to locate the exact source of the flood and in the meantime a major continuous mopping operation was in force to stop the entire basement, especially the office and St John's Academy areas, from the deluge. Thank God for Mike the Sleepless One who valiantly mopped continuously throughout the night to keep the waters at bay. Also thanks to the plumber who managed to make a temporary repair on the pipe. That's the good news. The bad news is that the pipe broke in the wall and should it break once more it will have to be replaced completely - a big and expensive job involving digging out to the main in the street. Just for the record no animals, in pairs or otherwise, were observed during this event.



Sbdr Pawel

(We need \$5,000. Money we do not have to fix this looming deluge.)



A Typical Saturday at the Mission – not really that Typical

I have been fortunate to be a volunteer for the Saturday program at St. John the Compassionate Mission for the past 2 ½ years. People often ask "what do you do at the Mission?" My response has been "whatever needs to be done!" St. John's is a unique place with unique people. They are what makes St. John's what it is. What does a typical Saturday look like? Well, there is no typical Saturday at the Mission. Each Saturday is also unique however. It is quite normal to have various groups come to volunteer. Groups can range from 4 to 8 people. Some are church groups while others are social organizations. They typically prepare the food that they will be serving to our patrons, and also sit and talk with them. Regardless of whether a group will be volunteering, my Saturday usually begins by 9:15 am. Until I was able to pass on my craft to others, my main task for 2 years was to prepare the most important staple, without which the Mission could not function. We would have a massive uproar, chaos, pandemonium! What you ask is this? It would be **coffee** - the life blood of the Mission. It sounds rather simple but it's an art to its own. Making enough coffee to last us from 11:00 am to 1:30 pm while, at the same time, not knowing how many people would visit that day. I rely on Edmund's ability to see into the future for guidance when it comes to this. By the time the remainder of the volunteers arrive, it's non-stop until 2 pm. Serving food, washing dishes, helping in the kitchen, sweeping, mopping, taking out garbage, organizing the freezers, washing windows, shovelling, etc... Most importantly we spend our Saturday's with people. These are the people that make up the Mission. They are the reason we volunteer here. As I mentioned previously: what do you do at the Mission? Whatever needs to be done!



Jeannie and the Holy Urn

Terry



New Staff Members



New Floor Supervisor: Nicole
"Great Job!"

New Cook: Ed
"It wasn't me!"

Winter Nights and Mornings Come to a Close

Our very own Winter Nights and Morning (breakfast) program has ended. This is the second year Shawn Burk has run the Nights program which ran every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night from Dec 4 to Mar 26 and Jeannie and her early-riser volunteers ran the breakfast program every weekday morning. After providing 1861 evening hot meals to our guests and an average 40 breakfasts per day, you can see how well this program was needed within our community. But it's not just the meals served that makes this a success. Winter Nights and Mornings provided

comfort in other ways to our family members. Finding emergency shelter, providing personal counselling and just having a warm safe friendly environment to be in is what really stands out for our patrons. This could not have been possible without the efforts of our own volunteers and the countless hours our Parish members put in this winter. In a world that is not always kind, it's nice to see such dedication to a cause bigger than ourselves.

Many things will be missed about this program. One that sticks out

above the rest is the story of an older gentleman who had lost his way in life due to drugs. It was a cold night when he arrived at our doorstep. It wasn't the fact he was broke and hungry, but that he needed someone to listen and guide him through a time when he wanted to take his own life. After helping the man with the usual guidance we provide, he came back weeks later to thank us for what we had done. As we thank all those who supported the program in cash, kind and time. We should all pray that this will be provided next winter.

Shawn



Metropolitan Nikitas from the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA came to visit the Mission on Saturday March 6, 2010 and discuss our Lived Theology School Program.

Metropolitan Nikitas challenged us to have courage to live the faith practically and not just in words.



Lived Theology School - A Diary

It's hard to believe it has been nearly seven months since we, Lived Theology School interns, arrived here in Toronto. I remember my first day - actually, let's make that "week". I was utterly adrift.

I had been to Toronto only once before, and that was almost a whole year prior, in October 2008, when I came to St. John's Mission to scope it out for the first time. I'd quickly become mostly comfortable with the few people I'd met and some of the activities that week. But this felt completely different. Being fresh off the boat from Saskatchewan, I got lost wherever I went (my sense of direction isn't exactly the keenest), and I felt very alone and cut off.

After a week of that, the other half of the LTS student body arrived - Michael. Things slowly became routine and more settled. I soon realized that Michael naturally succeeds in many of the areas in which I flounder; for example, he is great with directions and the transit system; and he speaks easily with almost anyone, and I don't. There are several reasons I am grateful Michael is here.

The work then started to materialize. Still being green, within a month, we were assigned to the newly-acquired St. Xenia House, filling it with residents and holding weekly house meetings under the tutelage of Fr. Roberto. Soon after, Michael took up teaching catechism classes as I started co-ordinating "helpers". We both became tutors through St. John's Academy and started helping to organize and participating in the many retreats at St. Mary of Egypt Refuge, and got a healthy dose of diverse other responsibilities. We have met many, but not all, of the Mission's "regulars". These people teach us how St. John's is run and keep us informed as required. We have met many notable, welcoming and irreplaceable people.

We're also engaged in weekly classes, and although they are taught primarily by Edmund and Sub Deacon Pawel, there are regular teaching sessions with Fr. Roberto and others that are as edifying as they are varied. The learning experience has also included thematic weekend retreats at the Refuge with visiting lecturers. It seems that every situation, task or person

that we are faced with can somehow teach us and be relevant to our aim of learning what Orthodox Mission is. And so the opportunities are not usually passed up.

Apart from our classes and our work at the Mission, we are rather actively involved in the life of the Church, St. Silouan the Athonite Mission Parish, singing in the choir, leading daily services when necessary and maintenance. With the influence and friendship of the members of the church, our experience - nay, our lives - are so much the sweeter and richer. I relish Sundays especially, as a day to worship God together, and also just be together. Actually, I will take this chance to thank the members of St. Silouan Parish for supporting us students by your work, your reception of us, your prayers, kind words and many donations.

We've been privileged to be able to show hospitality to several guests: Bishop Ioan Casian, Père Phillippe and Sylvie Cales of France, Fr. Luke Majoros, Pierre Danielo, also of France - a resident master baker, Fr. Moses Berry, parish priest of Theotokos of Unexpected Joy in Missouri, USA, and, most recently, Dr. Paul Ladouceur of Sherbrooke

University. Apart from the experiences being slightly to very nerve-wracking (depending on to what sort of cuisine our house guests are accustomed), it has been a great and genuine pleasure of mine to get to know these special people and provide for their needs while with us.

The last few months have been full of challenges, large and small. We are just now coming to the end of our Winter Program, as well as the fulfillment of Great Lent. The combination has meant many early mornings and late nights, and lots of work in between.

On the hardest days, the days that felt like a waste from the moment the sun rose, the days I am at my emptiest, my only hope is to beg of the Comforter, who is everywhere present and filling all things, that He will fill me too, with His love. Naomi, LTS Intern

"Love in practice is a hard and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." Staretz Zosima



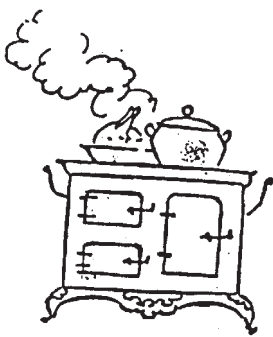
Lunch at the Mission

We just came out of the Chapel and the Refectory was like every day full of hungry people waiting for the meal to be served. Jennie came immediately up to me and with an anxious look says that there was an older fellow causing trouble at the table by the door. So I go, sit beside him shake hands, introduce myself to



Competition: Spot Stephen Harper!

him and everyone at the table. The "trouble maker" is an older wild looking man, his face carved out by the weather, his clothes dirty and worn out, and he has a beard the envy of most Russian Metropolitans. His hands are black from caked dirt. When he hears,



he is sitting with a priest, his face lights up and says with pride that he had been taught by Nuns in Midland Ontario. This "trouble maker" Joe is actually a very interesting person, what strikes me is that God is constantly on his lips and a reference point in all he says. I don't lose awareness

that you would not want to cross Joe in a dark alley. Whatever his story is, the result is that it has hardened him. He obviously has lost the art of talking to people but he clearly makes an effort to reach down to something inside of himself that he has not drawn out for a long time.

At one point he asks for a Bible. I leave him to go find one and when I return a half hour later he is still there waiting. When he takes the Bible in his hands he kisses it and begins to recite by memory all kinds of verses from the Psalms and including the famous St John, "for so God loved the world", then recited the whole chapter by heart.

He is, by then almost in tears and the trouble maker promises that he will now sleep with the bible under his pillow never to part from it again. I ask him to pray for me and he asks the same from me. There is spark in his eyes now. As I watch him linger in the mission I still want to make sure he does not cause



any trouble, I see he is clinging to the Holy Book and for a brief moment I saw him shine. F.R.

We would like to say a big thank you for the financial support from Mr. E. C., the Big Carrot on the Danforth, The United Way of Toronto, Focus North America, St. Pantaleimon Orthodox Church, Monastery of St Silouan USA and the many humble faithful people who helped to keep our doors open during the winter months.

Remember us in your will, who says you can't take it with you?



St John the Compassionate Mission

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