

## Notes from Mary Jo Leddy's talk at St John's 26th Donors' Dinner, June 7, 2012

*(After telling the story about why she instantly knew she wanted to accept the invitation to speak at St John's...)*

Last Christmas, on a Friday, somebody phoned and asked if she would see a refugee couple who were about to be deported. She said she'd see them on Monday. They arrived unannounced half an hour later. When she saw their faces, she knew she had to help. She found a lawyer who thought he could make a case for them but he would need time, and in the meantime they needed a refuge. So she and the staff phoned almost 20 churches asking for a place – they had many reasons for saying No, one was about plumbing, everybody said “but we're too busy, we're getting ready for Christmas” – she thought, ‘but his name is JOSEPH and he's looking for an inn for himself and his wife!’ Finally somebody phoned St John's and immediately they said, “Send them right over.” She said she wasn't surprised that St John's said yes because she already knew they welcome the poor.”

But at St John's, you don't call them ‘the poor’ – you know their names, their faces. They are not a social problem or category. You've seen their faces. It's the face-to-face encounter that you create a space for here that transforms all of us.

Thank you for this willingness to be with people and allow them to be your neighbour. This defines us as Christians: when we're with people, strangers who come to the door, we don't put them into little social boxes – refugees, the poor, the displaced. With Jesus, we say: they are our brothers and sisters.

Our greatest act of faith is every day to struggle to say: you are my neighbour. This is what you do here every day. You live in a room full of compassion where you allow yourself to be moved by one who is not necessarily your family or friend. This is the compassion of the Good Samaritan. If you're faithful to this compassionate outreach, it leads you to care about justice, about systems that leave people. To walk side by side with people is to begin to see the systems in our city, in our country, that make it more difficult for them, and us, to be human and to be happy.

We look for a more just world in which it's a little easier for people to be good, to be just (Peter Maurin). With more justice fewer things get in the way of us loving one another.

When you work here, garbage and its cost become important – you see systems at the ground level, the effect on people of decisions being made now.

Our commitment to the people we're with gives us a sharp focus on what is just and what is unjust in the world.

We're living now in a difficult time. There's a mean spirit in this country – the exercise of social cruelty. We need reasons to hope – not big reasons, real reasons. As long as something is happening that's good, that's kind, that's just, it gives us reason to hope – as with your response at Christmas – it reminded us that we're not alone in our struggles – that we're all gathered by the same Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus who commands us to love our neighbour.

I thank you for that. You sustain groups of people you don't even know about – like us at Christmas.

You know only a tiny fraction of the good you do. It ripples out and touches people. We're all held in the hand of God.

What are the big tour spots of Toronto? The Art Gallery, City Hall? They aren't the most important places in this city. This city is upheld by places like this – that sustain the fabric of this city. We thank you for that.