

Mission Life as a Teenager

by Daniel Tibayan, September 2017

My name is Daniel and I've been a part of the parish of St. John the Compassionate Mission for about four years now. Being the ripe age of 18, I am part of the youth at the Mission. Finding St. John's was one of the most impactful things that have happened to my life thus far.

I grew up attending an Anglican church, so there were a lot of changes that I had to go through. Changes like making the sign of the cross, venerating icons and my least favourite of everything, fasting. But not only did my way of prayer change, but the beautiful, funny and charming personality that I currently have was molded into what it is now because of how involved I was at the Mission, not just the church. There were various things that helped build my character, this included St. John's, but it also branched out to the Scarborough Mission Good Neighbours and St. Mary's Refuge, where I attended OWL youth camp as both a camper and a counsellor.

My first experience with OWL camps happened when my parents asked me if I wanted to go to camp literally two days before the start of the camp. I never went to any form of camping before, so I wanted to go with a lot of excitement. Within the one week that I was at camp, I formed bonds with the youth at St. John's, and even the other campers from different communities.

But I think it was just before the summer of 2016 was when I felt my life had already begun to change. I was offered a summer job from Paul to work at St. John's Bakery, the bakery next to the Mission. I agreed almost immediately because I was searching for a summer job for quite a while at that time. Plus working at a bakery sounded more exciting than flipping burgers at McDonald's. My first day at work, I obviously expected to be in the bakery, just as my job title implied, but that was most definitely not the case. I spent my first day doing my hours at the mission rather than the bakery. I was later told that I would be splitting my hours between the Mission and the bakery.

The first three weeks that I worked in the Mission, it was being renovated, so I took part in tearing and rebuilding the place the times that I was there. I think I was in the bakery two-three times a week. I learned how to shape and pre-shape the different doughs that were being made there. Both the Mission and the bakery have interesting and admirable characters. After the Mission's renovation, we were finally able to open breakfast, lunch and dinner for the community in the area. Paul went on vacation around the time we started to serve food, so I wasn't sure who would guide me to do what. Luckily the other workers/volunteers were kind enough to show me the ropes. I washed and dried dishes, served food, and sat down to talk to some of the people of the community.

I felt a rush of love every time I walked into the Mission to begin my day of work. In fact, I slowly stopped thinking of going to the Mission as a job, and more of something like a hobby. When my job contract ended, I still came to the Mission on Saturdays to volunteer. I probably would have gone more often than I did if school didn't interfere with the scheduling of the lunches. Since I was taught what to do during lunches, it was easy to welcome new volunteers and show them how we do things. At that point, I had realized how easy it was for me to talk to people now. This new-found confidence was even applied outside of the Mission.

The first week I went volunteering after the new year, Father Nicolaie told me about the Kids Klub that conveniently occurs right after I'm done volunteering at lunches on Saturdays. He told me that I should volunteer for that as well. I was a bit anxious at the idea of it. A bunch of kids aged 5-12 seeing a 17-year-old invading their fun. I thought they would all disrespect me because I was a new person. I agreed to do it just to see how it went. I walked into the basement after finishing my duties upstairs, and was surprised to see an interesting man named Gary who also attends St. John's as a member of the parish. He and a woman named Cassandra lead the Kids Klub.

My first day of Kids Klub was very interesting. In an attempt to try and loosen up the kids to start singing, Gary decided to host a Kids Klub talent show for the kids and volunteers to show something that was unique or interesting. I was put on the spot and didn't know what to do. I went up and did a stupid magic trick I saw on SpongeBob many years ago. It either made the kids laugh or amazed. I think all the kids liked me at that point and my name was quickly learned by all the kids. Every week now consisted of me going to the mission on Saturdays to volunteer upstairs serving food or washing dishes and then going to Kids Klub right after.

I was in grade twelve during this time. Post-secondary application deadlines were very close and I was miles away from knowing what I wanted to do. I decided to take a year off and work. I was then offered a job at the

bakery again. Now I currently work at the bakery as one of the mixers, mixing the doughs. After being offered the job, I was also asked to be a camp counselor for OWL youth camps. I agreed to do that also for some experience. Working as a counselor gave me more experience working with kids and youth. I was also away from society for a while, which was refreshing in its own way.

When I came back from camp, I was introduced to the Scarborough Mission called Good Neighbours. Good Neighbours is held in a small apartment being rented by the Mission, and welcomes the youth and adults that live in the community. They offer donated necessities to those that need it, and kind of do an after school program for the kids to have fun. I now currently work in the bakery three days a week, volunteer at St. John's two times a week, and volunteer at Good Neighbours once a week. My life is a lot busier now than I thought it would be during my year off, but I enjoy it, and I'm learning new things every day.