



ST. John

THE COMPASSIONATE
MISSION

Newsletter ★ Christmas 2023

*"Where else would your light have shone
except upon those who sit in darkness?"*





*A word from Father
Nicolaie, the Mission's
Executive Director*

The beautiful language spoken among us

One day at the Mission, one of the recent refugees who volunteers with was cheerful as he carried food-donation boxes in the basement. He was happy to show me a photo with his two young children and his wife.

We were recently on a trip to Europe, where there is a huge issue with refugees. Many die at sea before reaching the coasts of Italy or Greece. Toronto has problems as well. Just this week, four refugees came in from the street and spent a whole day with us, simply because it was peaceful and sane inside.

Refugees and other newcomers face challenges as they land here among us. As they start working, volunteering, or staying at our community house, we get a glimpse of their souls. They may be living tragedies, having left behind children they love or people they married. One wonders how they keep their sanity when such a broken love dwells within their hearts.

Not only refugees volunteer at the Mission. We have young people and old people as well. One day, a mother brought her three-month-old baby along with her. We have people with full-time jobs, people on ODSP, homeless people who come from the street, others who drive from places like Oakville or Richmond Hill, students from Japan and India and from up the street, where some live in subsidized housing.

People volunteer for just one day with us, or for ten years. Some of them remember coming to the Mission for the first time when they were only twelve years old. Others come in who just happened to walk by. Some of our volunteers are people who are in recovery after addictions, as well as university professors, and people with various disabilities. It would be difficult to be more diverse than the people who vol-

unteer with us. Even if we planned it like this, it would not come together so well.

Sometimes I wonder how they are able to understand each other. Or why they find nothing to quarrel about, amid these days when we live in a time of violent division. On the contrary, there is a generosity in doing good for others. It is a desire to be of help, and to learn the language of kindness, which is a stranger to none.

Diversity is imperative in moving toward unity. But a society or community cannot rely on diversity without having a common language. That language is the language of kindness, of being of help to others with no 'agenda,' but only with the desire to learn to care. A desire to come out of the insensitivity toward another person's suffering.

This is what unifies us. We see that first-hand today at St. John's. We all want to learn to speak this language that links us with each other.

But there is a paradox – the more you are in need and vulnerable yourself, and in serious need of the kindness of another, the more quickly you master the language of compassion. Look at the refugees from all over the world nowadays. They might have no place to lay their heads, or come out from shelters early in the morning just to speak the universal language in a foreign land. As a volunteer said today, "If I start to be kind with a stranger, I'll learn to be kind with myself too."

It is through this language that the humanity within us prays to God with boldness for the unity we have lost. It is through this language that we gain credibility before Him, and we keep our hope alive.

— *Fr. Nicolaie*

Mission twinned!

St. John the Compassionate Mission has been twinned with St. Matthew's Greek Orthodox Church in Blandon, central Pennsylvania – stmattsgoc.org.

St. John's and St. Matthew's have shared over the years the stories and joys of a common vision of the faith in the world. Our communities wanted to

make this friendship more visible, and practical.

This link has come with our mutual hierarchs' blessings. As Archbishop Elpidophoros of New York reminded us in a letter sent to the Mission, "Good things happen when we work together."

We look forward to this new partnership, and working together in the Lord's vineyard.



*Father
Demetrius
Nicoloudakis,
pastor of St.
Matthew's*

Good Neighbours, by the numbers

We're glad that our 'Good Neighbours' drop-in is busy. Or perhaps we should say we're glad that we've been able to help some of the many people in daily need in Scarborough.

Through the end of October this year at our store-front drop-in at Markham and Eglinton East, we've distributed over 120,000 pounds of food, and served nearly 30,000 meals. We have over 560 individuals registered. Consid-

ST. JOHN
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416-466-1357

info@stjohnsmmission.org

www.stjohnsmmission.org

Facebook stjcm

155 Broadview Avenue

Toronto, ON M4M 2E9

Charity #893281832RR0001



*An apostolate of the Carpatho-
Russian Diocese of the Ecumenical
Patriarchate of Constantinople*

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↑ Scarborough's Good Neighbours Drop-In, busier than ever

ering the families and groups they represent, some 2,600 people count on us for food. As well, every day we see 15 to 30 new individuals who drop by for food and other services.

Of the people who come to us for food, about 60% also seek some form of counselling, or need advocacy on their behalf. Some 65% of those we see are women; 75% are recent immigrants or refugees; 80% are from Africa, India, Sri Lanka, Ukraine; 15% are First Nations; 20% are men, women, or couples who live on the street.

We're also most glad to report that more than 100 volunteers donated a total of some 32,000 hours of their service.

Contact us to find out how you can help, too – phone 647-358-4105, or e-mail info@goodneighboursmission.org.

—pr

New joy around the working table

St. John's welcomes people from many of life's places in society: "from the west, and from the north, and from the sea, and from the east" (Paschal canon). We welcome them happily. We are diverse, and we like diversity.

In saying that, we could not help but notice over the last few years how the social turbulence in Toronto has produced, among other things, more social isolation among people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. They come our way more often than before, and they require our special attention. They have so much to give, and much has been taken away from them.

We've adapted our volunteering programs and the structure of the day to make it easier for them to join in the life of the Mission. We partner closely with St. John's Bakery in supporting their good work, and finding ways for people with disabilities to realize their dignity through meaningful work. More and more people with disabilities have become volunteers at St. John's. There is a new joy around the working table, and that joy is coming from them.

We have been looking for financial support for this new program. We would like to have a staff person dedicated to working with our disabled. As it happens, initial support has come to us, just before the Nativity. We are thankful to the Harry E. Foster Charitable Foundation for their new gift to help those with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Now we'll be able to extend our project, using a larger room within the community to welcome more people with disabilities.

If you know people who might benefit from this program, or if you want to be a part of this project, let us know. The large room accommodates many, and is always ready for hospitality.

On behalf of all the people who live with disabilities and have been helping throughout the year at St. John's, we are thankful for the support. The community is grateful for the contributions of the disabled who come to us. Their genuine joy has become a remedy to the world's sorrows that daily test our hearts.

—pNA

To The Light

Many of us find ourselves
In the chains of sin
That wrap round us
Like venomous snakes

We come to believe
We are but captives forever
Until our sorrows will
Have us take our last breath
Without ever knowing
A single act of kindness
Done for us without expectation

So we shut up our hearts
in the caverns of darkness
Inviting it willingly in
Until we no longer have
Any control over that
Which binds us
So what can ever set us free?

Being reborn not of water
But of the Holy Spirit
And following the Nativity Star
And rejoicing on glorious Pascha
Together.

The red door open to all.

Not a one of us ought
To know isolation and loneliness
But only good Christian friendship
And Love.

Do we still know how to love?

Christ teaches us how
And we need only
To give our burdens to Him
Who will also teach
The already certain and delighted
Among us how to walk always
In humility and hold our hand
And lead us out of bondage

To the Light.

— Elisha

Our 'Needs list' – can you help?

- eggs, sugar, pancake mix & syrup
- milk (powdered/fresh)
- olive oil, vegetable oil
- knapsacks, sleeping bags
- XL disposable gloves, laundry soap, men's socks, kleenex
- sweaters, scarves, winter gloves



Faces of the Mission



Left to right, top to bottom: (1) St. John's Bakery – "Good bread with fresh butter, the greatest of feasts" (2-4) 'Volunteer Appreciation Night,' Nov. 3 (5) We thank Malvern Onyx Lions Club for generously donating to Good Neighbours (6, 7) Welcome to Good Neighbours (8) Saturday artistry at St. John's