



ST. JOHN
THE COMPASSIONATE
MISSION

Newsletter
Spring/Pascha 2025





*From Father Nicolaie Atitienei,
Executive Director of St. John's Mission*

Healing of a Broken Heart

When we intentionally look for good around us in Toronto, we risk at times ending up disappointed. In looking for a 'conventional' good, its manifestation can often be delayed within the community. We could even say that these days it is the contrary. Many things look like the "chronicle of a death foretold," as Gabriel García Márquez puts it. A sense persists of things going from bad to worse, and the fatality which is around the corner can't be stopped by anybody, even though the tragedy unfolds under our own eyes. The wars around the globe bring more refugees into the country, even as the Canadian government changes its policies, expecting that 3 million people would somehow just leave over the next few years. The shelters are full, and people cannot get a bed in winter when it's -20° outside. Renting a one-room apartment requires a decent monthly salary, which many people don't have, without considering food and other necessities. Drugs were decriminalized in some provinces, while death by overdose is considered one of the most serious public health crises in Canada's recent history; more than 50,000 have died since 2016, and these are only the official numbers. However, the situation is less gloomy compared with euthanasia, by which some 60,000 people have been legally killed. Canada receives a very bad press when it comes to euthanasia around the globe, but here, people are not bothered. They are thinking of extending it to people with disabilities. The province of Quebec has already made the first step in that direction.

For us these are not numbers, they are people we know personally, and we meet every day. Some of them we host at our community house, for others we call the ambulance at 5:00 a.m. when they overdose in the Mission's washroom. At times, one of them may recover, while a hundred others die.

However, the logic of the gospel tells us that there is good news. Where do we find it? How can we share it with people? Has anything changed or is anything about to change? Maybe Tara's story could help us find some answers. This was told to us by someone who witnessed it.

* * *

When Tara came to the church doors, she was sick. She had dialysis treatment three times a week, an outcome of her diabetes. If she missed a session at the hospital, or drank too much liquid, you could see that in her face. Her body became swollen all over, making it difficult for people to recognize her. She knew that. She was always concerned with the way

she looked, on top of everything else. When she was younger, she was very pretty.

Illness was not Tara's only problem. She also had a bad addiction, which eventually took her life. The hospital said she wouldn't qualify for a kidney transplant because of her drug use. Tara was relatively young at the time, around forty, but the health system has its own priorities, and it does not necessarily offer much hope to those who lead a 'low quality' life.

It was painful to watch Tara when she came to the Mission. Sometimes she would come early in the morning and sleep on the floor, resting after a sleepless night. Other times she could hardly eat or walk. At times, a volunteer would have to help her cross the street. She lost any hope, and her life was slowly draining away. I remember thinking at times that she could not be blamed for taking drugs, as she awaited death without hope.

At one point, she accidentally hurt her leg so badly that doctors at the hospital told her they might amputate it. At the Mission, we anointed her leg with myrrh from St. Dimitry, a fragrant oil from Thessaloniki. "It healed fast," she later said, "and in a way I've never seen before." She knows wounds and how they heal, from her experience with diabetes. After that, Tara came to the Mission walking almost fine. I was wondering if it was because of the myrrh, but at the time I did not want to ask too many questions, so she wouldn't think that I was hunting for a miracle. And besides that, she was really sick with diabetes and with other serious ailments. So I was thinking to myself how could I speak about a miracle that heals one part of the body but does not heal you completely? Hey, this is a Mission miracle where nothing is perfect, I thought.

Instead, the great miracle Tara received was the gift of the presence of God in her life, in a way that she could not hide from or resist. She might have had many unhealed sicknesses, physical and mental, with many things and people

continued on page 5 . . .

ST. JOHN
THE COMPASSIONATE
MISSION

info@stjohnsmmission.org • www.stjohnsmmission.org
416-466-1357 • Facebook stjcm
155 Broadview Avenue, Toronto, ON M4M 2E9
Charity #893281832RR0001



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

©2024 St. John the Compassionate Mission

Want to help?



Shop at St. John's Eco Market

- See the coming-soon announcement on page 4

Visit St. John's Bakery

- "Award-winning non-profit social enterprise producing Toronto's best organic sour-dough breads and sweets"
- Check out our baked goods, as seen on stjohnsbakery.com
- Or, if you need direct sensory evidence, stop by our store at 153 Broadview, and leave happy



Volunteer

- Volunteers are the heart of what we do at St. John the Compassionate Mission
- Volunteer as an individual, as a group, or part of a corporate group
- Visit, phone or e-mail us to find out more, or tap the **Volunteer** button at the top of our web site

Donate goods

- Check the 'Needs list' box on page 5, and the longer list on our web site

Donate by cheque, or cash

- Tax receipts are issued, as we are a Canadian registered charity

Donate on-line

- Make a no-fee donation using PayPal, single or recurring
- Use a credit card, or a PayPal account
- Tap **Donate now** at the top of our web site
- CanadaHelps can also be used, but with a fee

Donate securities

- Planned donations in your will or life insurance policy
- Donate RRSP, RRIF, TFSA, stocks, real estate
- Donate through endowments, donor-advised funds, private foundations

Donate through your employer

- Your employer may offer (matching) donations through payroll deductions, as well as group volunteering

See the 'You can help too' menu on stjohnsmission.org

St. John's new Eco Market – Opening Soon

It's hard to believe it's been two years since we were forced to close our beloved St. John's Thrift Store, after operating for over twenty years on the Danforth. The great news is that after a long search and through the great efforts of many people, a new location has been found mere steps from the Mission at 740 Queen Street East.

We took possession early in January, and since then have been busy, through the efforts of many diligent, hard-working volunteers, readying to open in April.

The old Thrift Store shared with St. John's Bakery a common understanding of the value of work as a basic human need, with the people of the community at the

heart of both. The new St. John's Eco Market will offer the Bakery's products, along with reconditioned elements of the Thrift Store, an artisan market, a gallery for local artists, coffee, and space to sit and enjoy for a few moments in an increasingly environmentally conscious theme. Members of the surrounding community and our volunteers will be invited to contribute their talents to supporting the Mission's social enterprises.

We are grateful for the ongoing efforts of all those volunteering and contributing to the many tasks of preparation. It's been a blessing to see this come together by way of the never-idle hands of our community members and volunteers.

— Frank

Memory Eternal

Peter had a heart attack one recent Saturday morning, in the Mission's dining room. He died on the floor there, rather peacefully. This is somehow fitting, given how much Peter enjoyed being with the people of St. John's Mission.

He was a small and innocent person. For many years, his disarming presence lightened the community, and he was a beloved fixture of the breakfast program at St. John's. Every morning he traveled across the city from Scarborough for pancakes and lots of attention. Then he rattled down the ramp in his wheelchair, to commute to another breakfast the community was hosting at Good Neighbours in Scarborough. After that, he spent the morning awaiting lunch, and enjoying the drop-in's camaraderie.

With his twin brother Gordon, Peter also was a regular at prayers, and at the Mission's Saturday art program. Both brothers liked being at community events, and meals of all kinds. They were always thankful for what they had, and always ate whatever food was put before them without complaining.

At his funeral, there was a bulletin board titled "Peter's awards." Included in this display was a crumpled and

well-worn certificate from our volunteer-appreciation night the year before. Although a few hundred other people had received such a certificate at the time, I now understood what it had meant to him and his brothers to be recognized. Although it took me a while to realize it (given how blurry it was), the main photo used for his funeral and bulletin was of him receiving this award.

Requiescat in pace.

— Brother Luke



Peter and Gordon

lost. Relationships need healing as well. But in all this abandonment of a life falling apart, God healed her leg and He became the center of her existence. One could see in her a change of heart. She received the perfect gift in a world that was collapsing: the sign of a different kingdom where she started to dwell by being terribly sick.

During a visit to her at the hospital, she wanted to talk about prayer and to receive guidance. I remember the hospital room. It was prayerful, and hope was present. She knew that she was going to die. She was preparing, and she had a different type of hope that only prayer makes known. Her physical condition was changing for the worse, while real hope was coming into her heart.

This hope stayed with us even when we heard about her death. The change in her heart was real, and it touched ours as well at the time. It was summer when word came of Tara's death, when we were at St. Mary's Refuge. We had a memorial prayer for her there, and there was grace in the chapel – something from her heart was left for us, too.

We need to pray to see hope. And when we see it, it never comes from us. But from those whose lives we thought were hopeless. A change of a heart in a self-destructive time is the womb where the hope for a whole generation is reborn and renewed. And always through the heart of a poor person.

— *Fr. Nicolaie*

A New Part of Me

[We share with you – as an example – a recent letter we received from a volunteer at the Mission, with pseudonyms.]

Over the past year, I have been a high-school volunteer at St. John's Mission, which supports individuals and families facing poverty in downtown Toronto. The Mission's building is modest, rebuilt from a house. The chapel there has wrinkled prayer sheets that read, "This is a poor church, so please don't take this away."

On my first day, the manager handed me a yellow badge and quickly assigned me to help. I stumbled into the kitchen, where six volunteers squeezed into an

eight-square-meters space. Carrying plates, I served meals to visitors, mostly elderly individuals in winter coats that had seen better days. Despite their hardships, they smiled warmly and greeted me with kindness.

After two months of weekly volunteering, I became more involved. My responsibilities grew to include cooking, serving meals, and interacting with guests, particularly elderly and disabled individuals. I got to know Richard*, who struggles with social interactions but always keeps trying, and Karla*, a cheerful woman in her thirties with a cognitive disability. Their resilience inspired me.

One day, my supervisor at the Mission told me that he was impressed with my devotion. He offered me a blue badge for long-term volunteers, asking if I would like to make a commitment. Excited, I accepted the badge, without fully understanding its 'weight.'

The new volunteer routine began wearing me down after five months. Waking at 7 a.m., riding a bus for an hour, and working on my feet for four hours straight took their toll. Once, after staying up too late to study, I skipped a day. When I returned, the manager reminded me that people in the community relied on us volunteers. It didn't fully sink in at first. But two elderly guests asked me where I'd been, and Jenny said she had missed me and wanted to show me her new dress. I better understood what commitment was, and that my presence mattered to them.

Around the sixth month, my role expanded. I started guiding new volunteers and assisting an art teacher in leading creative projects. Despite limited resources, I felt proud seeing seniors and disabled individuals create beautiful artworks, many of which were displayed in the chapel or featured in brochures. Their creativity inspired me to paint a piece of my own, depicting life at St. John's, capturing its joy and resilience.

Last November brought the Mission's volunteer-appreciation day, I arrived feeling frustrated and overwhelmed by school and personal challenges. That's when my manager said to me, "We don't ignore pain or suffering, but we choose to be happy, and share that joy with others." His words resonated deeply, shifting my perspective. The Mission taught me the power of faith, creativity, and community in bringing hope and belonging to those in need. On the surface, I was helping others, but I received so much more from this community. I learned the power of love, which now will always be a part of me. I will wear this proudly, just as I did my blue badge.



Tara

Needs list – can you help?

- sugar, jam, pancake mix and syrup
- oil, herbs, spices
- pasta, rice, lentils
- men's socks
- XL disposable gloves, dish soap, bleach, soap (bars and liquid), shampoo





Faces of St. John's

Front page — Some of Tania's Paschal artwork, displayed on the Mission's east outside wall, and hosted here by Kerry
This page, clockwise from top-left — Vasilo-pita; breakfast at the Mission; spring sunshine is coming; at Good Neighbours; Hector; breakfast fellowship; at the Mission's Christmas 2024 play performance

