

The background image shows the interior of a church. On the left, there is a wooden altar with a fresco of a saint above it. In the center, a doorway leads to a brightly lit area. On the right, there is a large, ornate iconostasis with a central icon and other religious figures. The floor is covered with a patterned rug and scattered petals.

ST. JOHN

THE COMPASSIONATE MISSION

Newsletter • Pascha 2026

With the church at its center, the Mission is a sacred space for the poor and any one in any need, to taste and become part of “a world where mercy is inevitable, reconciliation is desirable, and forgiveness is possible.” (Archbp. Elpidophoros)

Fasting for the Lenten Word

As I write, Lent has just started. The smell of incense from the previous night's service still lingers in the room in the early morning at breakfast.

In church, we try to fast and eat less. The people who come for breakfast in the morning try to eat whatever is served, and at times as much as they can. A

young homeless woman, who is only skin and bones, asked for more food. She ate everything we brought. "I haven't eaten since Friday," she says. She is restless and loud, and at times it's hard to understand what she says. The food, though, calms her down. She asks for a cigarette, and a hug.

A man came inside wearing only flip-flops on his feet. He was very thankful for the shoes we gave him, for the food he was served, and for being able to sleep for a few hours. By the end of the breakfast program that day, his attitude changed, and he became violent when he was asked to leave. Johan had to call the police to make sure the violence did not spread.

At another table, two mothers with children stopped for breakfast before going to day care. The kids liked the yogurt, and smiled when the bells were rung for morning prayers.

According to Johan, that Tuesday we welcomed the largest number of people for breakfast since when he began taking care of the program. All the chairs were taken, and people were waiting inside and outside for food and to warm up. It had been cold at night, below -20°C. Either it was a miracle that all these people could be together in one place without any incidents, or it was all due to the good food and the way people are welcomed. Or both.

The beginning of Lent provokes a search in us to discover something beyond our thoughts and anxieties, something deeper and beyond the news we listen to and the noise that surrounds us. We look for a word that brings about something new and hopeful. We look for a different dialogue in us,



where we learn to stay still. This allows us to discover a word that is kind and teaches us communion, and does not antagonize our soul. For a word that feeds us – good food for the soul and mind, which nourishes life and joy in us. We learn in Lent to give up on control and self-determination. To recognize and be in touch with the fragility of our own life, so we can welcome and not reject the word that cares for humanity with love. We learn to become a gathering, like the folks who come to the Mission in the morning. They feel eased in mind and soul, and are fed with good food that is offered and not taken, by the Word that has become man. He who is broken himself and distributed to all, in ways we cannot see and comprehend, but of which we at times partake.

None will be left behind, and communion will be perfected through the new Word.

— *Father Nicolaie, Spiritual Father of St. John's*

Josephine the beautiful

A younger woman comes to the Mission most days, fairly early in the morning. I will call her Josephine here.

I honestly don't know if she has a place to live. Even if she does, she might be too mentally ill to make use of it. I've never asked her. It doesn't matter for me with her. She wants a double-double and breakfast. Those things we can give her. You notice her appearance and presence. She hides herself in a hoodie almost all of the time, her head covered.

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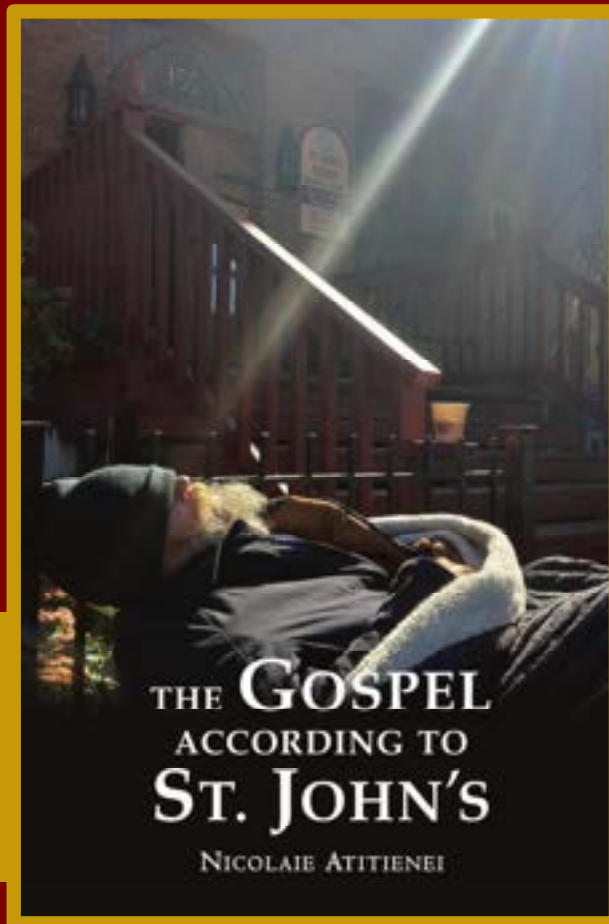


*An apostolate of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese
of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*

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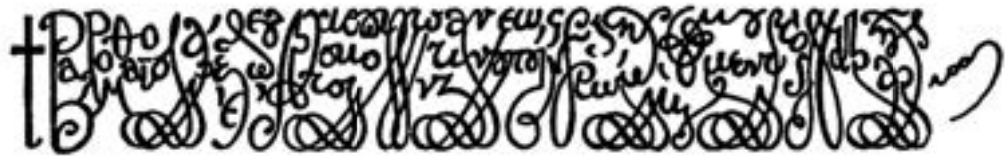


January 28, 2026 marked the fortieth anniversary of the founding of St. John the Compassionate Mission



As part of our commemoration of this anniversary year, we've published a collection of Sunday Gospel reflections by Father Nicolaie, the Mission's Executive Director and Spiritual Father.

Paperback and hardcover copies are available for purchase at the Mission, and larger-print paperbacks through Amazon.



To the Reverend Father Nicolaie Attienei, Executive Director, and the esteemed Members of the Board of Directors of St. John the Compassionate Mission in Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Grace be unto you and peace from God.

We received with heartfelt appreciation the gracious letter from Dr. Michael Saunders on behalf of St. John the Compassionate Mission of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America under our Ecumenical Throne, along with the report regarding your activities and financial stewardship in 2024.

In turn, it is with much paternal joy that we give thanks to the Lord for the forty years of faithful ministry, witness, and sacrificial love offered by your blessed community. Your ardent commitment has embodied a living *diakonia*—an ecclesial testimony that the Gospel is not merely proclaimed in word, but manifested in daily acts of generosity, compassion, justice, and solidarity with those who suffer.

In feeding the hungry, accompanying the lonely, sheltering the vulnerable, and affirming the dignity of every human person created in the image and likeness of God, you are participating in that hallowed labour through which the Church reveals the nearness of the Kingdom and the radiant beauty of divine philanthropy.

On this joyful anniversary, we extend to you, to the staff and volunteers, and to all whom you embrace in your benevolent outreach, our wholehearted congratulations and paternal exhortation to continue courageously in this holy work. May your witness remain a beacon of hope, a refuge of charity, and a living proclamation of the Gospel's inexhaustible mercy.

We bestow upon your fellowship our Patriarchal blessing, invoking the grace and consolation of our Lord, God, and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that you may be renewed in zeal, fortified in faith, and steadfastly sustained in your sacred service.

May our loving Lord, Who is wondrous in His saints and merciful beyond measure, grant you, at the dawn of this New Year, health, peace, spiritual fruits, and enduring strength in every good deed, to the glory of His holy Name.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 12 January 2026

Your fervent supplicant before the Lord,

✠ BARTHOLOMEW

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch

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Her clothes are battered and dirty. Her agony and anger are sometimes obvious, though through the monologue in which she is often engaged. Words and names are spat out in anger, grief, and regret. Listening, I can easily, and perhaps correctly, conclude she is talking about her children who were taken from her. And from their father(s).

To lose your children that way is such a profound agony and shame. From the things she says, I think one can sense her frustrated yet fundamental desire to nurture and care. I think I can hear a vocation to motherhood and family that could, in different circumstances, have given her a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Instead, there is mental illness, probably drug use, and the grief and regret. Instead of beauty and achievement, she has grubby clothes and dependence on others for her basic needs. Like breakfast, and a place to nap.

Still, Josephine has incredible beauty and grace in her. She has within a place of meeting, of profound humility, and of peace and love. God's place. I found it one morning after I carried up a basket of clean laundry from the basement. Normally, I throw the basket down, and if I don't fold it myself, one of my volunteers takes over. I set it down beside the table at which Josephine was sitting, and she looked up at me, smiled, and asked if she could fold it. I said yes, and she began to conscientiously fold the laundry with a beautiful and simple sense of purpose, and a smile on her face. She did it well.

In that encounter, I lived through and was transformed by some of the possibilities for life and grace that the Mission and St. Mary's Refuge make more evident and real. Because of that moment, I know that God loves us infinitely in a way that I may only be able to obliquely describe. I am sure, though, that this love will be able to permanently transform not just me, but all who come to the Mission. It was a vision of nobility and love, and a gift that God, Josephine, and others like her, are waiting to give us.

— Johan

'Like a bird alone on a roof'

During the 'space race' of the 1960s, China, the United States, and Russia dedicated many resources to overcoming the obstacles presented by

mounting a manned mission to the moon. This included satisfying the physical needs of humans traveling there, like food, rest, and exercise, and it also included in a significant way the mental need for human companionship. Back then, it was not thought possible that a human could make a trip to the moon and back, separated from the rest of humanity, without suffering some kind of mental problem. The Americans' NASA space program equipped their Apollo crews with radio transmitters that could keep the astronauts in constant communication with Earth. It was a compromise, and until the missions ended no one was certain that it would be enough. People from that time understood that physical proximity with others is not enough to stave off loneliness, and that humans thirst for meaningful interactions as much as they do for water, and are constantly hungering for spiritual and emotional support from others.

I met Patrick a few months ago. He came early one morning to the Mission, wearing a dirty jacket and no shirt. He clearly had been sleeping on the streets for some time, and his demeanor was aggressive, ready to lash out. Someone quickly recognized him and asked him where he had been this last year. Someone else half-jokingly said that he probably spent some time in jail. He neither confirmed nor denied this, but the interaction seemed to help him feel more comfortable. A little bit later, someone else asked him why he decided to come back to the Mission. He simply replied, "I was feeling lonely."

I met Brian a few weeks ago. A man in his late sixties, he lives in a nursing home for people who have led particularly difficult lives. Along with 100 other residents, he is in the constant care of a team of social workers, nurses, cooks, and janitors. He receives three meals a day, and medication to deal with his chronic pain. The building is incredibly clean, and offers many amenities. While trying to make conversation with him, I asked him what he does to keep busy in that place. He responded, with sadness: "There is nothing to do. This is hell. Most days I just stay in my room." I inquired about whether he has friends there. He shrugged his shoulders, and said, "There are people there, but no one really cares."

— Luis

You Can Help



Visit St. John's Bakery

- “Award-winning non-profit social enterprise producing Toronto’s best organic sourdough breads and sweets”
- Check out our baked goods, as seen on stjohnsbakery.com
- Visit 153 Broadview Avenue, and leave happy



Volunteer

- Volunteers are the heart of what we do at St. John's
- Volunteer by yourself, or as a 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 7, 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

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

Donate securities

- Plan 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

 ST. JOHN'S **eco market**

Visit our new store,
740 Queen Street East

See the ‘You Can Help’ menu on stjohnsmisson.org

'I was a stranger and you welcomed me'

When I arrived in Canada, I looked for places where I could volunteer. I needed it; I have always felt at my best when I'm helping people.

As a newcomer I arrived with nothing more than the contents of my suitcase. But here in Canada I found a place to sleep, and a home at St. John's. In this new house, I have found a stable family with Father Nicolaie, Brother Luke, the other volunteers and their families. St. John's is a family that is constantly in movement because of the people and their volunteers who, like me, search for a warm place to coexist, to eat together, and to help each other out.

I have learned that having money, or not, is not a deterrent to being able to share what is truly the most valuable, which is our time, and our most sincere good will. Those who can financially help and choose to share their resources, become a warm meal, clothing that protects from the cold, and art materials that are used to share moments of happiness and creativity.

Thank you, St. John's, for this incredible opportunity to find a home that lives in my heart.

— Amelia

2026 brings new Mission venture

A new apostolate for visiting vulnerable people blossomed in 2026, lead by the Mission's *starosta*, Miroslava.

Every week now, a team of eight visitors reaches out to vulnerable adults, who are often struggling with loneliness and abandonment.

A community building near the Mission, with some sixty residents, opened its doors to us, and welcomes our services. They also requested the regular presence of a priest to address some of the needs for spiritual accompaniment of these most vulnerable people.

One of the most common reasons for people choosing MAID in Canada isn't fear of painful death, but the loneliness and meaningless that often accompany the people whom no one seems to value. One estimate has it that by April of this year, the number of Canadians dead by MAID since its inception in 2016 will be nearing 100,000.

This new outreach by St. John's seeks to address the profound crises in our society. This illness of

the soul – which afflicts also the young – needs to be addressed by our entire society. The elderly and the young can help each other, and together rediscover the beauty of life. If you are interested in being part of this apostolate, call or e-mail us, and we can provide training and support for you as you pitch in.

Father Miloro Building and St. Macrina

St. Macrina Counselling Services offers professional faith-based counselling, and was started by the Mission in 2006. Two of its four counsellors have PhD degrees, and all are registered therapists with university degrees. St. Macrina operates in three different locations. The counsellors work with couples, families, and individuals from all backgrounds. Those interested can be self-referred, or referred by clergy and agencies who value the faith of their parishioners and clients, respectfully.

In 2025, St. Macrina saw more than 160 clients, and provided over 1,200 hours of counselling. After six years of steady service at the now-closed St. Stephen's Centre in downtown Toronto, St. Macrina has begun offering their services on the second floor of the Mission's new Father Frank Miloro Building on Queen Street East.

Please come and see us. While there, you can shop downstairs at our Eco Market, and enjoy one of its delicious Turkish coffees.



Our 'needs list' – can you help?

- sugar, jam, pancake mix, syrup, breakfast cereal, coffee
- oil, oregano, garlic powder, paprika, pepper, turmeric, basil, rosemary
- pasta, rice, lentils, dry chickpeas
- XL disposable gloves, men's socks
- bleach, laundry detergent, dish detergent
- fruit juicer



