

# ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER



## Ordinary Miracle Retreat, July 18, 19 & 20, 2008

The trickle of sweat that ran down my back did nothing to improve my mood. As my frustration mounted in the heat and traffic of a busy summer Friday afternoon the excitement I had felt in anticipation of a weekend away at St Mary of Egypt refuge waned. Finally I found the patiently waiting Elizabeth at Finch station and a couple of hours later we arrived at the refuge. Things quickly improved. First off Fr. Roberto fed us dinner. He likes to cook and being fed by him is a perk one gets on these retreats.

The theme of the retreat turned out to be "Ordinary Miracle", inspired I suspect by Sarah McLachlan's song of the same name (which is well worth listening to if you get the chance). We were given the task of going out alone for a time to observe what miracles might be present. We shared what we discovered afterward and indeed there were many

"ordinary miracles"; a dragon fly, a song of praise by frogs in a pool of water, a cross on a tree, a branch bending into the rapids. As the weekend continued the many ordinary miracles that surround us daily became more and more obvious to me. Obvious too became the reality that all of these are gifts of love from a God who is in love with us.

I came away from the weekend with an awareness of being deeply loved and of being surrounded by miracles everyday. The miracles of nature are easier to see perhaps in the country but they are present with us here in the city too. They are present when we are fed by our Priest, in the rain that we saw much of this summer and in the sun that causes trickles of sweat to run down our backs. Our challenge is to be aware of them and the love they represent.

Kelly Crawford



## USA Ukrainian Orthodox Youth Visit

In August a group from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Youth in the United States visited the Mission. Led by Natalie and her husband Ethan, Lesia, Julianna and Yegor, and not forgetting master Theo, took to the Mission like ducks to water. They painted upstairs. They painted downstairs. They painted on the way downstairs. They painted outside. They sang in the chapel and they sang outside the chapel. They laughed and they smiled with everyone they met. They fasted and they feasted with us. (Due to calendar differences in the Orthodox Church they went home to fast again!). They washed floors and dishes and set tables and served meals and sat and ate with people. They took a few photographs (397). Theo, at the grand old age of 19 months, brought out the motherly side of quite a few people at the Mission, including a few who didn't know they had a motherly side! In one single week they lived a year in the life of the Mission. On their return home one of the team said, "This trip far exceeded anything I expected. It has changed me for ever." We can only agree with that sentiment.

Sub-deacon Pawel

p.s. The team was missing one member, Khrystyna, who sadly spent the week in hospital. We wish her a full recovery and hope to see her next time.





## Sitting Next to a Saint

I often wonder where the Saints are today. What would a Saint look like? Depending on the “circle” you travel in, you may look for Saints with long beards and funny names, or a recovered drug addict hotshot with a great story, but the other day I finally saw one. He comes everyday and cleans our bathrooms. He had a very hard childhood and developed a serious “anger management problem” that keeps him to this day from getting a “normal” job. At lunch time Kris sits beside me for our daily check in. He shared with me that he thanks God everyday for having put the Mission in his life. As he cleans the toilets he prays to God that God will bless his work and keep him from anger. He knows his anger problem but each day confesses this to God and humbly begs his help. He has a close friend that he tries to respectfully care for. As I looked into his eyes and saw his beautiful smile I saw what a Saint looks like, one that would be at home here at the Mission. As always, we promised to pray for each other and then he moved on. He had more toilets to clean.

Fr Roberto

### Jo, A Canadian Philanthropist.

Jo is a Canadian philanthropist. His dedication, hard work and socially imposed generosity make him part of a growing number of Canadian philanthropists. It is thanks to people like Jo that our economy prospers and that big corporations are able to pay taxes and show their good citizenship by helping the needy.

Jo works as a day labourer, minimum wage for the “big boys.” Jo explained to me how none of the big corporations hire anyone any more. How he is lucky if he saves \$150 at the end of each month provided nothing happens. Well, this month something happened, and he is in a shelter, homeless and eating at the Mission. Jo is lucky he has no family to care for.

But Jo is not the only one who is contributing to the improvement of our Canadian society. There are countless families and single parents who also work to barely eat and house their children. It is thanks to this cheap labour and suffering that we can enjoy such prosperity, and yes even be generous with the “less fortunate.” I watched a documentary about 14 year old girls in a factory in China who make designer jeans for the western markets for as much as 6 cents an hour for a day that begins at 8am and ends at 4am. The program was introduced by saying: “Every affluent society is based on some form of slave labour.” As I listened to Jo’s story, this quotation came to my mind, only it was not about a far-away place called China and those people “over there.” No, I was witnessing it right here on Broadview in Toronto the Good.

So because people like Jo help make the corporations and the banks rich, because people like Jo keep us all well fed and help social service workers pay their mortgages, some of us start feeling maybe we should help the less fortunate. This new philanthropic movement is not just “give your money,” but “we will show you how you are to use it.” Rich people wanting to “help” but on conditions they deem worthwhile. A friend in Haifa (Israel) was telling me her frustration at dealing with Swiss philanthropic societies who will not help what their community actually needs and dies of. No, they have their own set of values. The rich always know what is best for the poor.

I remember the day when someone from the city, half my age who never had set foot in a poor neighbourhood, came and told me after twenty minutes of sipping coffee, that she was there to help us improve our “drop-in program.” This same city desk would later spend a lot of money to bring “experts” to help us “deal with the poor.” Such philanthropists don’t come to help and learn, they come to teach and improve. Often their so-called “charitable donations” go to well-established, well-greased “social services” like the big “poverty industry outlet” that seems to have endless cash to build housing and programs. Or the local community centre that seems to have endless funding for meetings and researchers who bring countless agenda items that no one ever seems to do anything about. Or the money they have to give out free crack pipes.

To be honest, I see two things happening. One is a liberal bleeding-heart social elite that makes, for example, ODSP available to drug addicts, keeping people addicted and out of sight. Then there is the form of “social responsibility” that uses profit earned at the expense of minimum-wage workers to help these many minimum-wage workers remain minimum-wage earners and not rebel. No the poverty of the addict is primarily and above all a spiritual crisis both for the person and for us as a society. I have seen too much (25 years plus) and listened too long to not understand that addiction and grace need to speak to each other. Everything else is simply and purely bandage. The churches need to wake up to this social crisis.

But the poverty of Jo and the many families I know is the product of the slave labour that happens right under our noses every day. As Voltaire once said, “the comfort of the rich is based on the discomfort of the poor.”

So I’m thinking of nominating Jo for consideration for the Order of Canada, as the representative of the most philanthropic and socially-contributing class to our affluent society.

## St. John's Children & Youth Programs Update: Full of 'Firsts'



On July 3rd, we held our very first graduation ceremony for the first group of graduates from our academic enrichment program – St. John's Academy. It was a festive event, with families bringing their cultural cuisine to share. Our amazing tutors were our guests of honour and each received a St. John's Bakery hamper. As well, several students who excelled in the program were awarded with special certificates and a free movie pass, courtesy of Alliance Atlantis. Thank you again to all that have made this program possible, helping to develop our local youth's confidence and academic skills: our fabulous tutors, World Vision, and Groia & Company Law Associates.

During the summer, we also held our first youth retreat at St. Mary of Egypt (near Madoc). This was a three night, four day adventure with a group of girls that attended St. John's Academy. The transformation that we witnessed in the girls from when we initially arrived in the countryside where they were afraid of the bugs and were desperate to be indoors, to when we left and couldn't keep them from the outdoors, was truly inspirational. It was certainly a fun-filled time with lots of fishing, swimming, marshmallow-roasting and frog catching. The focus of the retreat was 'receiving and giving' and the girls had the opportunity to reflect on all that there is to be grateful for as well as what they have to offer the world.



Another treat for the kids during the summer was attending a performance of Cirque du Soleil, who generously donated a number of tickets for our youth. We also held our regular Movie Night and bakery workshops, which have proven very popular.

With the summer now past, we look forward to helping more of our local at-risk youth strengthen their academic skills, broaden their experiences, and most of all realize how precious they are and how exciting the possibilities for their future are!

Sincerely in Christ, Lara Joannou  
Children's & Youth Program Director

## Visitors From Belarus

Mother Iryna and Sister Ksenia from the monastery of St Elizabeth near Minsk in Belarus visited the Mission and St Silouan's parish on Sunday 14th September. They brought a variety of things made by the nuns at the monastery that are sold to support their work among the poor and the mentally ill. Toronto was one of several stops they made in Canada. This was their second welcome visit to the Mission. To see the great work done by this monastery visit their new website [www.obitel.by](http://www.obitel.by)

## "The Sacrament of the Brother" (St John Chrysostom)

Christ the Saviour Sobor in Ottawa offered the Mission 12 new round tables for our daily meals, as part of the 1600th anniversary of St John Chrysostom. St John spoke about the two tables that are part of the church, the Table of the Lord which is the Altar, and the Table where the poor are fed.

We are grateful that our sister parish chose to put St John Chrysostom's teaching into practice by responding to our invitation to replace our old dilapidated tables with beautiful wooden round tables to welcome Christ in the person of the poor.

St John Chrysostom, we are certain, would heartily approve. The new tables have certainly added much to our sense of community.



## Thrift Store



Well hello all my brothers and sisters!

It's hard to believe that summer is over and fall is already here. And right away I'd like to thank you all for the beautiful donations. And what I really love is that you are bringing them up to the store yourselves. I love to see the faces behind the donations. As most of you know I have been on my catechumen journey and what a journey it has been. With the help and guidance from my godmother to be Hilda are dear Fr Roberto the task master. Random acts of kindness and compassion is what we are all about up here at the St John Thrift Store.



I could tell you a million stories. And there's one I must tell you. If you've not been in the store before this is what happens. I greet you at the door and I say hi, my name is Christian and because we're a church we don't charge tax. And I inform everyone where everything is.

It was a hot July day. A gentleman came through the door on his electric wheel chair. I greeted him, he said, hi Christian my name is Bobby and I have a very hard time with people serving me! And I replied I'm going to help you Bobby. Bobby was in a car accident seven and a half years ago and lost his leg. I helped him get out of the chair on to a couch. He wanted a suit and I helped dress him. I helped him up to the mirror. There were tears in his eyes and mine. He hasn't worn a suit in seven and a half years. Suit \$19.99, white shirt \$2.99, tie \$1.79, belt \$2.00. Bobby priceless!

We have a lot of people in need that come into the store. We are making a difference in the community. Nice furniture and clothing is always needed. I would like to thank all the volunteers. Without their help none of this would be possible. Once again I would like to thank you all from the bottom of my heart. (A translation of this article in Farsi is available at [www.stjohnsmisson.org](http://www.stjohnsmisson.org))

God bless, Christian

## Eternal Face

On a journey near and far  
Just my thoughts and my guitar  
Standing in front of him to say the creed  
A warm hug from him is what I need  
Write a letter to tell him how I feel  
I believe his voice it's what I receive  
Standing in front of him  
My yes clear and opened wide  
I waited for this time, to have him by my side  
I don't believe in anyone else  
It's his word against anyone else  
No one can tell me straight up  
That they're perfect themselves  
It's him who judges me  
Not anyone else

Trevanna Bondarenko

Written in front of the icon of  
our Lord Jesus Christ in our chapel



## Grant the Wonder Worker

Grant is our youngest volunteer. At the age of 10 he came with his mother our beloved Sarah the cook! Grant would run up and down the stairs getting for his mum an extra can of beans or tomatoes. Bright, helpful and a joy to have around, Grant was an example to all of us of what a good and generous person can do.



On his last day at the Mission Grant was awarded the "Volunteer of the Month" trophy and we all sang to him "God grant you many years." His mother was seen drying a few tears.

***Please check [www.stjohnsmisson.org](http://www.stjohnsmisson.org) for updates on needs and news.***

***Please do not forget to remember us in your will.***

St. John the Compassionate Mission

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