



# ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER Christmas 2012

## OUR CHRISTMAS PRESENCE - NOT JUST OUR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Each year, as we approach Christmas, we swirl into what feels like an extra hurried pace of life - decorating our homes, making lists, preparing feasts, buying gifts and then stressing about the lack of finances from spending more than budgeted, etc., etc.... These activities make us feel like we are being pulled away from focusing on what is the real meaning of celebrating the Nativity! As St. Athanasius of Alexandria profoundly stated, "He (God) became what we are so that He might make us what He is" - Love perfected.

His Holy Presence to us in mankind is God's gift to us! What a gift of Love!

How do we, on our small way, try to express our love and thanks for God's gift? Are we really present for Him? Are we really present for each other?

Here in our community, our presence with each other is a daily expression of our love for each other and for God. Especially at teatime and at

mealtime, we not only share physical nourishment with food and drink, but spiritual nourishment with our presence with each other.

To look into a person's eyes, to talk and listen to one another, and to be present - that is a great gift to give and receive.

Too often, I'm guilty of allowing my daily tasks of phone calls, emails, and meetings to keep me from teatime or lunch - the gift of sharing in the presence of each other. I am grateful to Janice, Joanna, Aida and others who remind me (or nag me) of the value of making time to stop the busyness of the daily tasks and partake in the

sacrament of the presence of one another.

Especially at Christmas time, let us all try to focus on our presence to each other- not just our presents.

*Presbytera Maria, Director of Operations*





# The Three P's at St John's Bakery



**P**eople: Someone once said, "You treat your employees the way you treat your best customers." I have been working since I was 20 years old and I never saw that come alive until I began to work at St John's Bakery. The level of trust and support is unparalleled. Regardless of one's job description, everyone is treated the same. Each person is vital to the successful operation of the bakery and is treated with the same dignity and respect. No one is elevated above the other!

Furthermore, no problem is too small or unimportant. You can be sure that if you have a concern, there are people willing to listen, take action on your behalf, and help as much as they can find a resolution.

My co-workers are perhaps the best people I have had the opportunity to work alongside in my entire working career. They add significantly to my daily well-being. There is much laughter and encouragement. The level of camaraderie is very high and it is genuine. It is good to work with a group of people who do not fear making mistakes and who are willing to help you improve your performance by telling you the truth.

The person who has had the most significant impact on my day-to-day journey at St John's Bakery is my supervisor Linda. There is an open trust and releasing of additional responsibilities as soon as she realizes I am ready. I do not always get it right, but Linda still continues to give opportunities for improvement. Linda's management style contributes significantly to my development and she is always willing to teach and share trade secrets.

**Performance:** The ability to perform well consistently does not come easily. However, when you work with people who genuinely care about you that is half the battle won.

I work in the sweets department. When I first started, I was told that one of my duties is to sell in the retail

area. It was "love at first sale." I discovered I loved serving people and began focusing on developing myself in that area with full support and encouragement from my supervisor, Linda.

When there are good, genuine people around you, your ability to perform escalates. It is then you begin to give a part of yourself for which no employer can pay - your heart. Then, this is reflected in what you produce.

**Product:** I believe the people involved and the ability to perform at one's best, has a significant impact of how well products survive the market place. St John's organic breads and sweets by far surpass what is available in the GTA and perhaps the whole of Canada because it is not only an amazing recipe but also behind them stands an environment that is conducive to the high quality products that is made at the bakery.

I have had customers who refuse to eat any other kind of bread. I stand with them because I feel the same way. People come from Burlington, Markham, Scarborough and many other places that are not in the vicinity to stock up on bread and sweets.

When I hear customers make comments like, "your gingersnap cookies are the best I've ever tasted" or the comments on how delicious the brioche is, I cannot describe the sense of satisfaction I feel to have the opportunity to be part of such an amazing venture.

*Cheryl Persad*



Cheryl



## CHRISTMAS NEEDS LIST

- Beverages:** Coffee, Tea, Sugar, Juice
- Breakfast Items:** Powdered Milk, Pancake Mix & Syrup, Cereal & Oatmeal, Peanut Butter, Jams and Jellies
- Non-perishable and Canned Goods:** Canned Vegetables, Beans, Chickpeas, Tomatoes, Tomato Sauce, Tomato Paste, Fish
- Condiments:** Ketchup, Mustard, Salt & Pepper, Herbs, BBQ Sauce
- Grains:** Rice, Quinoa, Dried Beans, Lentils, Split Peas and All Varieties
- Personal and Household Supplies:** Diapers (newborn - 5 and adult), Dish Soap, Hand Soap, Toothbrushes and Toothpaste





## God Is With Us



St John Chrysostom emphatically proclaimed in his sermon on the Nativity, “All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.” This is the crux of the gospel message; God has come and saved us.

To the Christian, the statement, “Christ is born!” it is more than just a hollow expression said during some gift exchange, it is a profession of faith. It is a profession of God’s manic erotic love for humanity. Christ’s adoption of our human frailties and the making Himself touchable and visible demonstrates the great outpouring of God’s love on all humankind. The ‘Pantocrator’, the creator of all; the One Who is larger than the heavens, allowed Himself to be held as a fragile infant in the arms

of all those who traveled to see Him.

A person can only imagine what emotions these individuals who filled the manger must have felt



when they first realized they were holding Him who holds the cosmos. Scripture tells us that the magi recognized the infant as the Lord, so they no longer felt compelled to return home by the very route they

has used when they came to see Him. The magi have been given to us as an example; all those who come and intimately receive Christ will become new persons, no longer returning home along the same beaten paths they used to frequent.

Let us proactively guard ourselves against the noise and babble which has unfortunately become characteristic of this season. Instead, let us also enter into the presence of the humble God who has made Himself known in the most tangible way, as a small child. Therefore, all who hold the Lord intimately against his/her heart might be changed and become a new person. Isaiah prophesied this to us saying, “Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. For to us a Child is born, and of His peace there will be no end.” Let us rejoice that God is with us, and that He has come to save us. *Paul, (member of the new leadership team)*



## Making Room at the Inn

No matter how clichéd it sounds, the Christmas season has always been an oasis for me. No matter how stormy things got, within my family and otherwise, everything was okay during the holidays. For my father’s side of the family, everyone put themselves aside and wholeheartedly took the opportunity to be thoughtful in their gift-giving and to bring their talents to the table – often quite literally, in the effort of preparing our annual breakfast. Nearly every year my mother and I would make the trek down to Virginia (about an hour and a half long for us, but much, much longer for others) to see beloved family members I might not be able to visit for months and months. Those are memories that would carry me through the rest of the year.



My family no longer lives in the same city, and we are no longer able to celebrate the holidays the way we used to, but I feel profoundly that my Christmas traditions continue here at St. John’s. Just as Christ was, from the moment of his Incarnation, “the light that shines in the darkness” lying in a manger in a cave amongst poor shepherds, the Mission is shelter amidst the storm of life for so many of the souls, rich and poor, who we see here every day. This is especially true in the bitter cold of this season, least of all for me. I sincerely thank God for the opportunity to make my home with this community. *Kent, (is a student at the Lived Theology School)*



## Hoedown Reflections

**S**t John the Compassionate Mission, St John's Neighbourhood House. I work here (over 2 years now), I also pray, laugh, and sometimes cry here. In reality I live here and it's a life my 2 youngest children to a great degree, share.

We recently held our annual volunteer appreciation "Hoe-down" celebration. It gave me a moment to reflect on the reality of what we live here at St John's. What is compassion? Who is our neighbour?

At the hoedown, we had a big blank poster that everyone was encouraged to write on something about St John's. I had written "poli agapi" (lots of love). That my children had written on the poster too, I discovered later. One had written "a good home" the other "family". These children, who just over two years ago, lost their home and contact with half of their family through the tragedy entirely beyond their ability to grasp. While they and everyone who walks through our door receives, is a completely natural, unselfish-conscious pouring out of love, compassion, and a sense of belonging, of being "home". That is the reality of St John's.

I don't just have a job here. I have a life, love, and a family. After 2 years here I know that no one who comes through our doors (or even shares time with us on the steps) leaves empty or alone.



*Linda van Voorthuizen, (part of the new leadership team and in charge of the sweets department of the Bakery)*



Pictures: (top) square dancing with caller Jackie and live band

(middle) Linda

(bottom) Peter Tabuns MPP presenting the Peter Stire award to Glenroy during the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Volunteer/Staff Appreciation Night October 2012

## Everybody Loves Stanley!

**S**tanley ‘Stan’ Yoo, 22 years old, is among St John’s newest and youngest volunteers. He is a bright and conscientious young man, with a strong desire to offer up his talents to his local community. Stan represents a growing trend among volunteers within the St John’s community; i.e. those who proactively scour websites such as Craigslist and Volunteer



Stan

Toronto in search of volunteer opportunities within the city. Since the end of September, Stan has generously committed three days out of his week to help-out in the Mission’s kitchen, which is in addition to his other volunteer activities at St Joseph’s Hospital.

Stan’s social consciousness was pricked early on in his life, emerging from the lessons taught to him by a few of his teachers, as well as the morals he gleaned from reading graphic novels. Those seeds were further nourished by a number of on-campus events he attended while studying at UofT, which made him particularly aware of the disparity between the ‘haves and have-nots’. Growing increasingly dissatisfied with the injustices he noticed in the world, Stan was inspired to use this transitional period in his life to enter the fray of the marginalized. “We are all human beings, not stone cold rocks,” Stan explained. “Telling someone to ‘tough it out’ can only go so far. Everyone has to do their part to help those in need.”

Stan continues to be intrigued by the Mission and the people who make it a house of hospitality. He particularly enjoys the conversations he has with others; a person recounting to him their story of an abusive landlord, his conversation with the social worker intern Keven and his many experiences, or speaking to Fr. Roberto about the causes of and solutions to poverty. For Stan, St John’s is a place where you can freely interact with other people – hear and exchange the stories of our life, and to be a part of them. “I don’t know what it is,” Stan wondered to himself, “people are more welcoming and open here... a unique friendliness.” *P.T.*



Kids salad making workshop, part of the Kettle of Fish Programs



Yet, awaiting another year for the visit of St Nicholas. St Nicholas has been visiting St John’s since 1986.



### Stats for the last year:

437 people volunteered during the last year putting in over 13,000 hours

5 tons of potatoes were planted and harvested by the Mission to feed itself and the families in need

### Food for families

Each family takes home about 30-40lbs per month of non-perishable and perishable food resulting in 21,840lbs of food distributed during this pass year.

### Meals served

30,000 during the last year & 6460 alone for winter breakfast program during the 19 weeks of service

Thank you for the ongoing support

from:

Chick-n-Joy Restaurants-(Scarborough, Whitby and Pickering) George Kastanas

ongoing support from: Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church in Mississauga, ON

St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Richmond Hill, ON

St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Church (Old Calendar), Toronto, ON

All Saints Greek Orthodox Church, Toronto, ON

Annunciation of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Cathedral, Toronto, ON

Sts. Panteleimon, Anna and Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Church, Markham, ON

St. George & St. Rueiss Coptic Orthodox Church, Toronto, ON

St Maurice & St Verena Coptic Orthodox Church, Toronto, ON

St Moses and St Katherine Coptic Orthodox Church, Toronto, ON



Thank you to Carolyn Ruby, Associate at McCarthy Tetrault LLP and her daughter Jaimee Ruby for initiating and delivering food and food gift cards to the Mission from the Food Drive at Jaimee's school - Montessori for Children in Toronto and principal Tracey Fenster.

We thank them all for their care and support!

## Is Christmas Really One Day?

When I think of the Christmas season, I usually picture beautiful Nativity services, sparkling white lights decorating porches of houses decked out in garlands of green and wreaths of red bows, of mulled wine and bright holiday parties; but most of all I think of the special week or two when my entire family and many friends are collected together to celebrate this most important event in the life of the Church.

This year will mark the first time I have spent Christmas away from my family, in order that I can participate in its celebration at St. John the Compassionate Mission instead. I cannot make this statement in all truth however, because the community at St. John's has welcomed me as a family and become one to me even in the few short months I have been here already. The love, attention, and care that people extend to all who come to the Mission has drawn me in so wholly that I can say with certainty that I await the celebration of this coming Christmas day with much anticipation, and look forward to taking part in all that the day will bring.

*Jacquelyn, (is a student at the Lived Theology School)*



Fr Roberto with the children celebrating St John's Feast Day!



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