



# ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER Christmas 2014

## Please & Thank You!

**E**dna, who recently passed away, taught us the gift of gratitude. She would utter this word in the midst of many difficult and painful times in her life: "Please & Thank You!"

In the midst of this Christmas season, we say **Thank you.**

In the midst of so much suffering throughout the world, we say **Thank you.**

In the midst of loneliness and isolation of those who are poor, rich, we say **Thank you.**

To each of you who continue to support the work of the Mission for the last 28 years we say **Thank you.**

Thank you for the people at the Mission who show

us great courage in never giving up.

**Thank you** for the strength to love and forgive, often in heroic ways, that so many people live.

There is a multitude of loving, forgiving people in a world that has its share of misery and sin.

This presence of goodness and hope in people is unexplainable in merely

human terms— as much as we would like to think we are the saviours of ourselves.

It is the *mysterium tremendum*, the tremendous mystery. It is the very presence of God as one of us. Is this not what Christmas really is about, this and only this!

**Thank you!**



Evelyn (left) & Ashley (right)



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# ST JOHN'S WINTER BREAKFAST PROGRAM UP AND RUNNING

Our winter breakfast program is up and running under new management and with a new cook for the 2014-15 winter season. Opening on November 3, we went very quickly from serving 20 guests on our first morning of operation to around 60 or 65 guests on a typical morning by mid-November. We expect those numbers to keep climbing as the temperatures outside keep dropping.

Monday through Friday, our guests are invited to come in from the cold as early as 5:00 a.m. for coffee and tea. By 5:30



the self-service table is good to go (cold cereals, toast, donuts, etc.), and by 6:00 we start serving Gerhard (aka "Geri") Sina's (picture, left) world-famous scrambled eggs, pancakes, and sausages. Breakfast is available until 8:30 a.m. five days a week.

If you would like to volunteer when the rest of the world is snuggled in their beds, or get some ideas for items to donate (food and non-food), shoot breakfast manager Peter (picture, right) an email at [peterjsanfilippo@gmail.com](mailto:peterjsanfilippo@gmail.com). Among other things, we can make good use of an ongoing supply of brand new toques, scarves, gloves, and heavy socks.

Several guests have already told us that we run the best breakfast program around. This would be impossible without the many good-hearted staff and volunteers who work exceptionally well together. I thank each and every one of them from the

bottom of my heart as I bumble through the learning curve of my new duties.

Please pray for the staff, the volunteers, and most especially the beloved guests of our breakfast program!

*Peter, Breakfast Mgr.*

## DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM

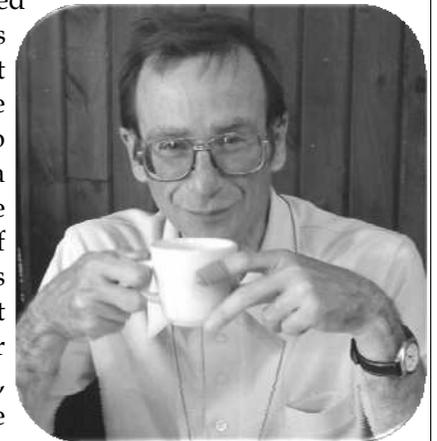
The Diabetes Prevention Program is being run through St. John the Compassionate Mission from October 2014 to December 2015. It is operated in conjunction with other programs of a similar nature throughout various Toronto neighbourhoods, and is funded by Toronto Public Health. The Program's Coordinator is Ashley, and the Peer Leaders are Faiza, Alexandra, Daisy, Sharon, and George.

The goal of the program is to make community members aware of diabetes, its implications, and to offer insight into how it can be prevented. The primary focus is the prevention of type 2 diabetes, which 90% of all diabetics have. In Toronto the rate of diabetes is about 8.1%.

However type 2 diabetes can be prevented. Thus the Diabetes Prevention Program targets the groups most at risk.

Throughout the coming months, St. John the Compassionate Mission will be offering workshops both on and off site. These will consist of information sessions in the

form of interactive lectures, but will also have other components, such as community kitchens, gardens, and fitness classes. It is hoped that community members will learn how to prevent type 2 diabetes and have the tools available to influence their lives in a positive manner. As more people become aware of diabetes and its implications, the result will be a healthier community. This, in turn, will have a positive impact on the ever-burgeoning costs to the health care system, resulting in fewer patients. Thus the realization will be putting people on guard against diabetes, and giving them the information they need to combat this chronic disease. *George Wisniewski*



# THERE'S HOPE FOR ME TOO?

Loneliness has many forms. Loneliness can happen in our relationships with friends, family, the workplace, and in many other situations. Loneliness is natural when people are alone, cut off from others, but also the inner solitude that somebody feels even when he is with others, especially if those others are loved ones.

The feeling of loneliness afflicts people of all ages, whether at home or at work, regardless of financial status or family situations.

Christmas is often a difficult time for some suffering loneliness, though it is a celebration of hope. A time we face the cave of Bethlehem looking for the opportunity to go back to our childhood years. To set aside the daily stress of



our present lives, and remember customs and traditions. It is a time to forget the present pain and return to the simpler times of the past. For some, however, especially at the Mission, this is not possible. It is a crisis of the times and of our present age, which causes some to be unable to shake off the agony and the question that is burdening them: *how will my future be?*

A few years ago around this same time of year, while I was working at the Mission, there was a middle-aged gentleman named John eating his lunch. His hair was grey and knotted his beard unkempt and dirty. John and I spoke once in a while but it was usually just cordial greetings. John once had said to me, I love coming here but don't talk to me about God. On this day, however, he appeared not have eaten or slept for a while. He asked me for another bowl of soup and some bread which I brought to him. He continued to eat in total silence. This was not usual for John. He was normally quite talkative, but that was not the case today. The one thing caught my eye on this day was his strange routine: one slurp of his soup, one bite of bread, and one glance behind him. For the next 5 minutes, all I noticed was slurp, bite, and glance. While I was cleaning the table next to him, I heard this little polite voice call me to come and sit with him. With frustration and sense of embarrassment in his voice, he asked me a very direct question: *who is this big guy behind me and why is he staring at me?* Initially I didn't know whom he was referring to but I then realized; directly behind him is a large icon of St Moses the Ethiopian. At his request, I explained to John who he

was. I proceeded to talk to about the life of St Moses and his transformation from criminal to patron saint of peace.

By the time I finished the story, John's head had dropped. He slowly lifted his head but all I noticed were his bluish-grey eyes watering looking deeply into my eyes. John then asked the simplest yet most powerful question: "So does that mean there's hope for me too?" My response was also simple: "Of course. All we have to do is ask for forgiveness." John's eyes lit up and he said how he needed to have a conversation with God.

He smiled and shook my hand and thanked me, not just for the story, but for also not shoving a bible in his hands. He told me "that's what I needed to hear; that there is hope, even for me."

Just before Christmas, a few weeks later, John suddenly stopped coming to the mission. I asked some of those who knew him and one person told me that John had left Toronto and headed out west to live with his son whom he hadn't seen in 10 years. This was a journey that John needed to take - a journey into his past in order to heal the present and comfort the future. John has never returned to the Mission but I am confident that he is at peace with himself, his family, and more importantly, with God.

*Fr Dn Theodore*

# EDNA IRENE STRATTON

a long-time friend and member of the Mission, died on November 4, 2014.

Edna was born in New Liskeard, a town in Northern Ontario, but at 15 she ran away from home and spent most of her life in Toronto. When she first came to the Mission on Blake Street, she had "several lives" of misadventures. Her coming to the Mission marked the beginning of a new phase in her life that eventually culminated in what those closest to her described as a beautiful death. The last seven years, Edna could no longer come to the Mission. She received great support from some of the people who had met her at the Mission and their friends who accompanied her for the last part of her journey.

Edna played an important part in our life here at the Mission. She showed us a child-like (not childish) simplicity that through humour and simplicity could find a way to a person's heart, even a hostile one.

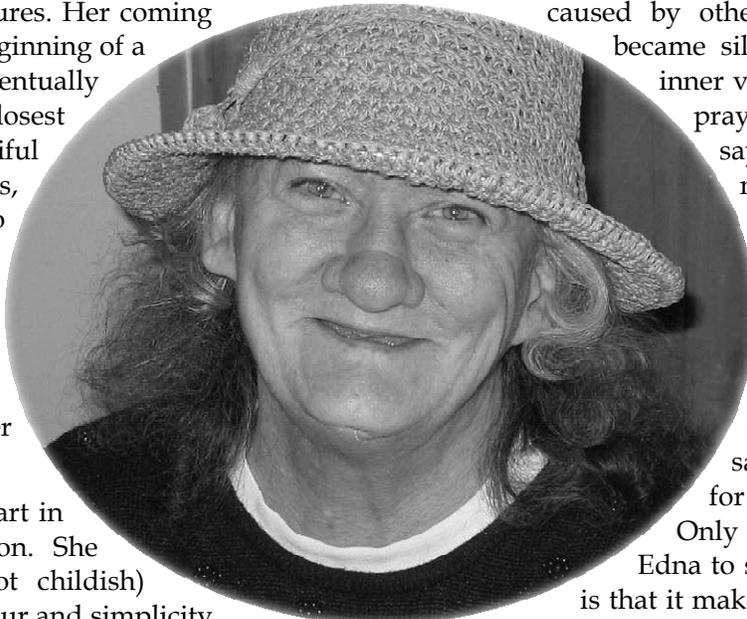
Known as the "mother of all Fridays," she fed the Mission for years every Friday when the Mission had no cooks. She was famous for her boiled corn and re-heated KFC. She loved when you would stop and just sit beside her and talk. Each of us has colourful stories left to cherish until we all meet again for corn and KFC!

The one that stands out for me was the evening Edna had come to the Mission threatening to kill herself with a kitchen knife. After several hours of her weeping and screaming when she poured out all her pain and suffering caused by others at a very early age, she became silent. I remember hearing this inner voice saying to me: "Ask her to pray." When I did, she refused, saying: "I do not know how, I never have prayed before." Again the voice insisted I ask. After a long silence, she began: "Lord ... "I was expecting "Lord help me" or "Lord why?" or "O Lord kill them all." Rather, her words stun me to this day. She began saying: "Lord, I thank you ... for the love people show me." Only the Holy Spirit could teach Edna to say this prayer. Part of trauma is that it makes it almost impossible for one to receive love, much less give thanks for it. The ability to receive and give thanks for love is a sign of deep healing in a person with a history like Edna's.

Her humour, joy and gratitude towards those around her continued: from the witness of those who were with her until the very end of her life.

F. R.

Memory Eternal!



## VOLUNTEER/ STAFF APPRECIATION NIGHT

On November 7th, 2014 our annual Volunteer/Staff Appreciation Night was celebrated with country dancing, Sean & Rudina (picture) with a live band and dance caller Jackie leading the way to new dance steps for all. Volunteers & Staff received an award and everyone dined to fabulous fried chicken (donated by Chick-N-Joy), salad, fries, southern baked biscuits and home-baked cake.



## CHRISTMAS NEEDS LIST

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| - Rice             | - Canned Tuna   |
| - Regular Tea      | - Canned Meat   |
| - Dry Lentils      | - Couscous      |
| - Fresh Fruit      | - Baked Beans   |
| - Fresh Vegetables | - Snack Bars    |
| - Tomato Sauce     | - Juice         |
| - Canned Tomatoes  | - Cereal        |
| - Tomato Paste     | - Pancake Mix   |
| - Dried Beans      | - Pancake Syrup |

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