



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

Great Lent 2013

I want you to
share your
Bread with the
hungry, open
your homes to
the homeless
poor, remove
the yoke of
injustice, let the
oppressed go
free. Isaiah: 58



Vicky, "breaking bread"

Welcome New Volunteers!

Maria and Bernom came from Nicaragua to Canada five months ago. They discovered St. John the Compassionate Mission through a Toronto volunteering website, liked the sound of the place, and emailed Fr. Roberto. Once they got into contact with the Mission, they visited and appreciated the environment, which confirmed their interest in volunteering here. Their first official day as volunteers began on the first of February, and immediately they said that they liked the place. Maria and Bernom enjoy helping and serving those in need, and so look forward to becoming a part of the community of St. John's. J.P.



*Please remember the Mission in your will - yes,
you can take it with you!*



A Fresh New Start

As a first year placement student from George Brown College I did not exactly know what I was getting into when I entered the mission. I have had the privilege to work and volunteer with other communities during my travels, but I have never been a part of such a loving and inclusive community before. After just a month at the mission I realized how everyone has accepted me with open arms, and this includes the staff, volunteers, and other community members. I was skeptical in the beginning to wake up at five am three times a week, but I find myself full of joy to help participate in the breakfast and lunch programs. It is impressive what this mission does for the city, and I am proud to be a part of it. I want to thank the St. Johns community for accepting the new students as part of the community, and we look forward to continually building new friendships.

Adam Clark

This winter marks a considerable increase in the amount of food that's needed to serve meals. We average over 6,000 meals per month from 2,500 last year. In December and January our breakfast program served over 2300 breakfast from 960 last year. We really could use more food donations and volunteers for our Breakfast Program.

"The Loss of a Friend"

Jesus was an important part of the Mission life. Jesus came to Canada as a refugee, fleeing the violent situation of his country. Changes in the present Federal Government meant that he was refused refugee status in Canada. During his time with us Jesus shared his many skills, talents and helped to keep the Mission safe and functioning. Often mistaken for (the Jesus) he was a daily reminder that whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do it to me. He will be missed.





Great Lent 2013

Dear Friends of St John's,

You do so much to bring hope to the city and I am thankful for your unwavering support. As I look ahead to a new year, please know that every meal, every hand we hold, every support we give is because you choose to show compassion.

Every smile seen at our summer camps for children, youth and seniors is because of your support. As you read through the pages of our newsletter, I hope you know that your kindness makes a difference. Thank You.

I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that in 2013 the Mission will continue to live the vision that Jean Vanier shared with us during a visit to the Mission. A vision of beauty, compassion and valuing each person. Without your support, the life of this community wouldn't be possible.

May you be surrounded with warmth from family and friends this Winter season.

Sincerely,

Fr Roberto

Fr Roberto Ubertino
Executive Director

P.S. If you've supported the Mission this year, thank you for your support.

*"This is the vision of
St John the
Compassionate Mission.
Compassion isn't just
doing things for people,
it's revealing to people:
You're beautiful, you're a
child of God, you have
value. Their anger isn't
just against society-our
competitive society-but
the greatest pain is when
people become angry
with themselves, and
begin to hate
themselves. This is one
of the greatest pains."
Jean Vanier*

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The “sacrament” of Coffee

Without this, the Mission would close! Are we talking about money, food or staff? Yes, but an important element to the life of the Mission is. ...Coffee! *

The power of coffee has the strength to affect world economies. It is a very important cash crop in many developing countries. It is one of the most consumed drinks in the world. It has an ancient and fascinating history. The health effects are debated. But no matter how we drink it, hot, cold, strong, weak, fancy or as is, oh, we love our coffee.

If there is not a pot of coffee on and ready at the Mission to offer to someone who walks in, then how can we be called a place of hospitality?

Sit down, take a moment from your day and have a cup of coffee. The taste and smell is delicious but most importantly it brings an opportunity to share in fellowship with one another. It is a sacrament of fellowship, belonging and healing. It is a vital means to an end.

From the moment we sit down with someone to share in a coffee, we begin to talk and listen to each other sharing news, ideas, worries, joys, jokes and stories. This is the beauty the Mission, to **be** with the other person. Two souls in communion with each other; open to giving and receiving of the presence of each other. That is the beauty of true fellowship.

This would all be difficult to set up or achieve without the blessing of coffee.

** This article is not meant to discriminate against tea drinkers; this is just the bias and reflection of the author. The same could be said about the effects of tea globally and at the Mission.*

P.M.



The Lived Theology School, sharing “the moment”



“The Welcoming team!”
Vicky & Tess

“Fr Hernan from San Lorenzo Anglican Church, Toronto gave a moving reflection on the Gospel and being a refugee in Canada.”

"Shining like the Sun"

a reflection

I rush around, being busy, helping people, doing good. Yet I find it's easy to take for granted the people that I rub shoulders with every day. When I was a teenager I remember reading something Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, wrote. One day, while walking down a main street, he had this almost mystical experience where he saw how each person was walking around shining brighter than the sun. This experience opened his eyes to the mystery and glory that often lies hidden in every person. He ended his reflection saying, "How can we remind one another that we are all walking around shining brighter than the sun!"



Barb, "sees the light"

Recently I was reminded of this story or I learned the personal history of two people who have been coming to the Mission almost every day for several years now. In learning more about these two people I was struck by the many difficulties and hardships they had struggled with. Each appeared in the light of incredible courage and I felt physically the presence of Grace in each of them. This exchange deeply humbled me and challenged me never to take for granted or dismiss anyone.

In each person there lies a deep mystery, even in the most broken of lives, flows a stream of mercy and each life is a miracle of grace.

May I have the grace to see always my brother and sister walk around "shining brighter than the sun".
F.R.

News from the Thrift Store

10 years ago I made the discovery that Hell is not outside of me, caused by external causes, but is within me. I didn't know what to do with this discovery, how to live in that hell all by myself. I had no peace.

That summer I went to Romania with my children to visit my family. Somehow I found out about a monk, the son of a famous Romanian philosopher. This monk's name is Fr. Rafail. I wrote him a letter, crying out my despair to him and asking him to pray for me and for my children. His answer for me was a book that he sent me, a book written by Fr. Sophrony, his spiritual father.

When I came back to Toronto, I found the small (back then) parish of St. Silouan the Athonite and the Mission of St. John the Compassionate. I learned then that Fr. Sophrony was the spiritual son of St. Silouan, which makes Fr. Rafail his spiritual grandson.

This is how I came here, and this story is very dear to me, it shows me the care and love that God had for me long before I knew what I'm looking for, long before I realized that what I longed for so desperately was to rest in His love, in His house.

Among the people that I came to know at the Mission and the Thrift Store where I started working a few years ago, people that I shared stories with - stories of pains and sorrows, of mistrust, of resentment

and anger, people with whom I shared laughs and tears, people that I broke bread with, I came to learn



Camelia, "looking brightly"

that I am not alone as I thought, that we are One in our brokenness as well as in our wholeness; that we can be broken and still whole. That actually we cannot become whole unless we wear our brokenness in all humility and truthfulness. Unless we dare to be vulnerable with each other, open and honest, in spite of our fears, lack of trust and prejudices.

I had learned that the ones, who wear their scars, wounds or handicaps on the outside, are mirrors of what we are made of on the inside.

Having compassion for them, I have learned to have compassion for myself, a radically different thing from the self pity I treated myself with before.

I am learning to choose reality over fleeing into fantasies about myself or others.

Things that I had not learned as a child in my family, I am learning now, in this home, in this family that I found here. Slowly and painfully, I am growing but this pain is a good pain, one that carries within itself the seeds of Joy.

Camelia Chirila



Sophia & Emma, "shining bright"

THE BACK PAGE



St. Moses and St. Katherine Coptic Orthodox Church

Sunday Evenings: A foretaste of something beautiful...

This past December, during the Mission's monthly volunteers board of directors meeting, the council in the presence of 30 or so volunteers voted unanimously to reintroduce a Sunday games and community night which was to run from the beginning of January to the end of March. As we were wondering who would take up the mantle of this service, a recently established sister mission, **St. Moses and St. Katherine Coptic Orthodox Church** under the direction of Fr. John and Tasoni (Presbytera) Mary, generously offered to direct this program.

Beginning at 3:30 in the afternoon (not long after Sunday liturgy), volunteers from St. Moses and St. Katherine begin preparations for the evening. While supper is cooking in the kitchen, the volunteers dress the tables with linens, candles, and an assortment of board games. Doors open at 5:00pm and dinner is served. The aroma of Michael Taylor's famously brewed coffee fills the air while the sounds of conversation and music carry the night away.

This weekly dinner is a prefiguring of heaven. Time passes inexplicably quickly and a common love rests on all those present; it is the presence of the Lord amongst us. The evening finishes at 7:30pm with many of those present asking themselves in one way or another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us..." (Luke 24:32)

For several weeks now, the volunteers of St. Moses and St. Katherine's wonderful community have spared nothing of their own strength and love to make a common home for all people at St. John's. With the help of our very own Glenn Roy, and the delicious meals prepared by Julio and Tess, Sunday nights at the Mission have become, as one volunteer put it, "family time." We look forward to forging even greater bonds with our sister community of St. Moses and St. Katherine, and we congratulate the Coptic Orthodox community of the GTA for establishing a house of hospitality in the heart of Toronto's downtown core. P.T.

Thank you for your support and contributions over the Christmas Holiday!

Especially to:

- * Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church - Richmond Hill
- * Prophet Elias' Greek Orthodox Church - Mississauga
- * St Panteleimon Greek Orthodox Church - Markham
- * Global Egg Corporation - Toronto
- * Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary - Toronto
- * St. Maurice & St. Verena Coptic Orthodox Church - Toronto
- * Greek Community of Toronto - Social Services, Compassion Department
- * The Culinary Adventure Company - Toronto
- * St Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church - Hamilton, ON
- * Panarcadian Federation of Canada - Women's Division
- * Supreme Egg Products Inc - Etobicoke

Needs List:

- Fresh Fruit
- Fresh Vegetables
- Herbs
- Juice
- Fresh Eggs
- Fresh Milk
- Tomato Sauce
- Canned Tomatoes
- Canned Fish/Meat
- Dried Beans/Lentils
- Bleach/Laundry Soap
- Coffee & Tea
- Diapers (Newborn-5)
- Dish Soap

Did you know...

that St John's Mission (www.facebook.com/stjcm) & St John's Bakery (www.facebook.com/StJohnsBake) are on Facebook?

Please "like" us and tell your friends.



St John the Compassionate Mission

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