



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

Summer 2013

Mission Opening New Location

St John the Compassionate Mission is building deeper relationships with families in need and working with them to address their growing needs, especially in the areas of food security. When the Mission first opened its doors on Blake Street more than 27 years ago, the community was made up of a handful of families. Children and parents living in rougher neighbourhoods saw the mission as a safe haven - a welcoming place where you could enjoy a warm meal and the kindness of Father Roberto and his volunteers. Even now, many years later and a new home on Broadview, **families continue to be a vital part of the diverse community belonging to St John's Mission.**

The Kettle of Fish Programs are aimed to teach families and community members living on a low income about nutrition, and to give them access to healthy food. The programs include supplementary food resources, fitness classes, community kitchens, a Good Food Box Program, and educational workshops focused on health, nutrition, parenting and financial management. Although one of our goals is to provide our families with the educational and physical tools in making healthy and affordable food choices on a small budget, we truly aim to build strong relationships of support with our families. We want them to feel that they are an important part of our community; a sentiment often not felt for those people that society has made feel as though they are not worthy and do not belong. It is through our programs and supportive relationships that

our families are given agency over their food security and human dignity.

A lot of members who are from the St John's Mission community come from the South Riverdale neighbourhood, but every year we are expanding with people from other areas around the city. Many families **are travelling across the Greater Toronto Area to be**

with us. According to the *Profile of Low-Income in the City of Toronto*, "while many low income households continue to reside in [downtown area of] Toronto, the past 20 years has seen growth in the number of neighbourhoods with high concentrations of low income in the inner suburbs." Contrary to the common image of prosperous families living in large homes with big green lawns, we can also see these large pockets of poverty in the suburbs - where



The Mohmand family making up some tasty treats during a community kitchen at St John's.

many people dependant on social housing and assistance are tucked away in underserved communities of low and high rise apartment buildings, townhomes and motels. Immigrants, refugees, visible minorities, people with disabilities and lone parent families make up a large majority of those living in these communities, and of **those families joining our community at St John's.** The vast size of these suburban communities make it more difficult for those with small incomes and no cars to access spaced out grocery stores, to get around on foot or by public transit, and to find and go to work.

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

Scarborough is home to a significant proportion of our socially and economically vulnerable families and we recognize the need to connect with them. **St John's Mission is currently looking to expand our reach in isolated neighbourhoods in Scarborough where there is little support in terms of services, community centres, jobs or access to fresh and affordable food.** We are in the process of working with families, local community organizations and service providers to start a community initiative centered on food security and bringing people together. But we don't want to be just another food bank, or seen as giving charity. **We want to build a community**, one where people can get to know each other and become friends. It will be a community where we'll work together in addressing the needs of one another with a focus on nutrition, access to affordable food, housing and job opportunities. People will have an active role in changing their situations awhile building a healthy community around them.

We intend to start small just as we did on Blake Street many years ago. However, our biggest hope is to grow the St. John's Mission to include many families in Scarborough by living amongst them in their neighbourhood. And together, there's no telling how big our community will grow - and how many people's lives can be touched in the process.

References: City of Toronto. Social Development, Finance and Administration Division (2011). *Profile of Low-Income in the City of Toronto.*

By Ashley Grzybowski, Kettle of Fish Family Programs Coordinator at St John's

Part of a reflection written by a mother who regularly volunteers at the Mission.

"I think the poor are richer than all of us. They don't hide, don't use masks, they show themselves the way they are...

They don't envy you.

They don't judge you, they tell you simply what they think about you, but they don't erase you from their hearts, they forgive you.

I think their suffering and tears broke the layer of stone that wrapped their heart.

I think there is so much we can learn from them. I think they are closer than all of us to the Kingdom of God."



Sandor and Ciella



How Tutoring Has Helped Me

My name is Jibril and I have been tutored in math and English. I would like to say that this program has helped me ever so greatly. I cannot begin to describe how thankful I am.

In this program I learned how to put my thoughts on paper. I used to write my sentences missing a word but thanks to Saint John I have improved. I also didn't use periods, commas, and question marks because I forget where to put them but not anymore. I didn't just learn language I also learned math. Before Saint John's I disliked math because I wasn't any good but now I love math because it's easier to do. Last but not least, I was a wreck at organization; I still am, but I improved because Saint John's helped me focus, so I can't procrastinate and I can do my work.

I thank Saint John's Academy for encouraging, helping, and waiting. So I can improve on my skills, I especially like to thank Nora, Glory, and Bodh for helping me better myself.

Jibril Osman, Gr. 8

Jibril is a graduate of St John's Academy. This program has helped children from our neighbourhood not to fall behind in their classes. We are always looking for tutors, if interested email: stjohnsacademy.tutoring@gmail.com.

The Joy of Gardening, Feeding Ourselves

By Laurentiu Albu

Friends of St. John the Compassionate and St. Silouan of Athos joined again this spring to beautify our gardens. Under the direct supervision of Linda, this year, St. Phocas garden was seeded and planted with many vegetables, some of them brought all the way from Minorca Island thanks to Christina. **We got together on 2 weekends to offer the soil seeds and seedlings that Sophia grew since February.** Will they grow to bring harvest? So we believe and pray. Our soil improved miraculously after adding compost sprinkled with holy water in the fall and spring. Chiara, Evelyn and Presbytera Irina watered the field joyfully after Father Roberto blessed them in the paschal sound of the inherited ancient church bell that Alastair pulled untired. Solomon was so glad to have learned a new song: The Paschal Troparion, "Christ is Risen!".



The Gardeners

In the meantime Julio is bravely keeping away from our garden all chewers. I just got word that the deer fence is up. This year Aaron dragged to the field the best poles one could find: cedar trees. Aaron's planting experience and zeal showed in the fields closely seconded by Eliana, Aurora, Taylor and Owen. Gavin led our efforts in the native species area, around the chapel where Prof. Paul and Jesse made it look like a garden. I almost forgot Johan who took great pictures and cheered everyone by sharing them at night. And not last Mary who quenched our thirst with best water and juice I have drinking in the garden. Ohh and our wheel barrow master: Steve who found and carefully delivered all plant trays.

Special thanks to all children that joined us into the garden and participated to the Divine Liturgy and to the expedition on the other shore, all the way to the 4 cows, meadow and ...back. The magnificent: Maria, Agnes, Solomon, Philomena, Barbara, Eliana, Sophia, Alastair, Peter, Lucas. And our canoe sound speed deliverer: reader Michael. The gift of the Divine Liturgy was offered to us in the first day of the week by Father who was accompanied, very early in the morning, by S-Dn Theodore, Haroula, Maria, Michael, Christina and Bernadette. What a gift!

Anyone experienced the unique, rich quietness of the fields in the country, rarely interrupted by a few words? Come and hear! Thank you all for making this possible in the garden of our refuge.



Left: Solomon, Julio and Lucas



Left: Linda, Aaron and Sofia

St. John, a Friendly, Compassionate Place that's Real (and Much Needed)!

From my great desire to prevent problems and frustration in the lives of others, I started volunteering at St. John the Compassionate Mission to help the homeless. While volunteering at St. John, I've listened to stories from people, both the poor who come here to eat, and volunteers, too (who coincidentally also eat here). And because this place dares to welcome people's honest feelings (even if they are not-so-pleasant), I have heard things I rarely hear outside of St. John. I would guess that the people who've told me their stories had a great need to share their honest opinions without being judged or ignored.

Hearing people's not-so-pleasant side of life is valuable to me because I want to help people, and such information is vital to understanding what the problem is.

On the other hand, when people only appear happy and rarely ever talk about their not-so-pleasant side

of life, I'm left confused about how I can help them. And soon enough, they one day vent out their frustration or show other signs of unhappiness, suggesting that they weren't fine when they appeared all



Left: Patricia and Patricia

happy...

But it's not entirely their fault if people are not expressing their inner feelings. In a tricky way, our society's culture can be an obstacle that prevents people from expressing their inner self, leading them to keep their issues to themselves. Sometimes, they can talk about them

to their loved ones or family. But sometimes, differing opinions in a family can lead to judgement, thus leaving people with few or no people to openly talk to. This "cultural obstacle" is tricky because it both abides the law and is well-intentioned; most people find it depressing to hear the not-so-pleasant side of someone who isn't their family. Not me, though. I find it a useful learning experience because I feel a great need to make life better for everybody.

I think St. John is trying to promote the importance of such openness that is motivated by compassion and friendship. I think St. John is trying to be a place where people can tell or listen to the not-so-pleasant side of life. Come to think about it, I think I now understand the meaning of someone's comment about St. John "being reality." And I say St. John is a reality worth keeping.

By Stanley Yoo



Tom in his Spring Outfit



Maria and Bernom

St John the Compassionate Mission

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