



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER Summer 2014

OWL Camps: Building Bridges

Sunlight streams in through the storefront window of San Damiano Foundations in Madoc, Ontario, flooding the cramped dining room now filling with students from Centre Hastings Secondary School down the street. They've come for a quick, hot lunch they might otherwise have gone without. I've come for them.

That is, I've come to invite them to Our Whole Life (OWL) Youth Camps, operating just a twenty minute drive from here at St. Mary of Egypt Refuge this July and August.

This place must feel strangely familiar to anyone who's spent time at St. John the Compassionate mission some two hundred kilometers away. Hemmed in amidst mismatched tables and chairs, standing on the scant remaining floor space in front of the open kitchen, I request the eaters' brief attention. Spoonfuls of unidentified casserole levitate momentarily in front of adolescent faces now inclining with studied boredom. As I begin to describe team construction projects of the past and future, kayaking, swimming, hiking, tenting, and the like, spoons settle and hands begin to leaf through the brochures I've placed on the tables beforehand. Two and a half lines into my spiel, a chorus:

"Three hundred and fifty dollars? I can't go to this camp!"

"No way my parents have three hundred and fifty dollars for summer camp!"

"I could come up with maybe forty, but who's got three hundred and fifty dollars?"

I'm struck by how nonchalant, how unguarded they are, declaring their lack in front of each other. Theirs is a shared poverty.

"Don't worry," I cut in. "You can come to this camp even if you don't have the money."

OWL Camps operate, one could say, in the same spirit that animates St. John's: the spirit of sharing, both ways, between those who have little and those who have much. To the effect, some would say, that all participants, all

contributors, find that they have what they otherwise would not: community with one another.

I assure my young audience that, thanks to any number of generous donors, they will be welcome at this camp regardless of their ability to pay. Now, a perceptible glimmer, a sense of possibility, plays across their faces. Now they ask questions about team construction projects and kayaking and swimming and hiking and tenting and the like.

"I want to go to this camp," says

one resolutely.

Talking to their parents later, having already assured their child's participation, I ask plainly: "What dollar amount could you contribute gladly and without hardship?"

How will they respond? Opportunistically, or in kind?

"I could do \$200," pledges one.

"I can definitely pay \$100, and possibly more," volunteers another. "I'll call you back in a week."

A number of them pledge to work as volunteers for the camp or for St. Mary's Refuge; some will make good on that offer within days. One father hands me a twenty – the proceeds, he tells me, from selling some piece of personal property expressly in order to contribute something toward his son's camp, OWL Camps.

They want to give.

In a very real sense, gratitude and self-offering are the foundation of OWL Camps.

These folks get it. And others along the highways and hedges whom I've somehow

managed to compel, from Toronto to Marmora to Tweed to Belleville to Trenton... they get it too.

Many people have given generously of themselves to help make OWL Camps what they are. Fr Roberto and Mary Marrocco provide oversight. In recent years, one Luc Lafond has contributed the vision, passion, and know-how that make it possible for OWL Camps to operate as construction camps. Campers aged twelve through seventeen invest brain and

continued on p. 2



Power to Accept Others

Jesus looks to His disciples and says to them, "...whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16) In a certain sense, Jesus is saying to His disciples, "Whomever you choose to be compassionate towards, whomever you choose to accept, whomever you choose to advocate for, I also will be compassionate towards, accept, and justify." There is a life-giving power in accepting others, loving them, and having compassion with them. In the Church, this happens both formally, and informally. Informally, this is in the demeanor and approach of each parishioner towards others. Formally, this is practiced in the Mystery of Confession, where we can return to God our Father, in the embrace of the Church our Mother. Confession is that moment of acceptance, of compassion, of healing. Receiving this promise from Christ Himself, that whosoever we, as His Body the Church, accept will be embraced by all of Heaven; I



Sunday evening dinners hosted by Fr John Boutros, his parishioners and volunteers with Fr Saraphim El-Souriani, Fr Daniel Habib & visiting youth from St John Coptic Orthodox Church, Los Angeles, California and local Coptic youth from the GTA

implore every person to accept, to co-suffer, and to advocate for their neighbor. In the words of Jesus again, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40).

Fr John Boutros

continued from p. 1

brown, working in teams under Luc's guidance to build lasting structures which will enhance the utility of the campground for themselves and future campers for years to come.

I've heard Luc express his sense of gratitude – for a life full of benefits and opportunities, and especially for the guidance, instruction, and other advantages he himself enjoyed as a youth – which motivates him to give back. I've heard him describe the sense of ownership-as-care, ownership-as-responsibility, contrasted with ownership-as-entitlement, which he aims to instill in young people through OWL Camps. Add to that an element of ownership-in-communion, as opposed to ownership-by-exclusion, and to a Christian ear, this sounds remarkably like stewardship. Eucharist, even.

This year's construction project happens to be a bridge. God willing, alongside that physical bridge, we'll build some metaphysical bridges as well. Bridges of faith, bridges of community... Bridges between the well-off and the not so well-off,

between urban communities and rural communities, between Christian communities, between Church and the un-churched...

Forty-five children and youths will grow physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially through formative and enriching summer camp experiences at OWL Camps this July and August. Approximately half of those will come for the first time. Roughly the same number, twenty-five young people to be precise, would be unable to participate if not for the generous financial support from the wider community of St. John the Compassionate mission.

I invite you, as a member of this community, to help make this bridge-building project a reality for those young people, with a donation – whatever amount you could contribute gladly and without hardship – to St. John the Compassionate Mission, earmarked 'OWL Camps'. I can't tell you the impact it will have.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Aaron SanFilippo, Camp Director – OWL Camps



Fr Demetruis Nicoloudakis, from Blandon Pennsylvania was our guest speaker at our 28th Donors' Dinner.

Needs List:

- Fresh Fruit, Fresh Vegetables
- Tomato Sauce, Canned Tomatoes
- Dried Beans, Baked Beans
- Canned Tuna
- Couscous
- Quinoa/Bulgar Wheat
- Gluten Free Staples, Snack Bars

Within a Heart of a 12 Year Old Child

One thing among many that I learned at the mission is to pay better attention. Now, to be attentive is a struggle and it is not something that we are able to acquire at once. One would say it is a gift received following long ascetical practice. To see things the way they are, to perceive the reality. Not for us though. However, at the mission, reality does not wait for you, but it comes to you and sometimes it is overwhelming. And you cannot say “I wasn’t really there” or “Sorry, I wasn’t listening, could you repeat?”. As we know, life is not repetitive. For instance, if one morning a person in a state of shock comes to you because he has nowhere else to go, and he comes because he just discovered that his roommate was lying dead in his bed after they had drank a couple of beers together the evening before. So you cannot really say “Please come tomorrow, we are closed” or “I’m in a meeting, have some coffee and I’ll talk to you later”. You really have to be with that person in that very morning, to pay attention to him and to the reality he shares with you. Now there are other things at the mission that ask for our attention. The mission is about the people. However, sometimes the mission is about the saints as well, and by this I don’t

mean to say that the saints are not people. For instance, I see St Filofteia differently following an event that I lived at the mission. I must talk briefly about who St Filofteia was. She was a 12 year old child who chose to pay attention (to stick with the main theme of our story) to some poor people, while she was on her way to bring food to her father who was working in the fields. This happened south of the Danube River, which is in today’s Bulgaria. St Filofteia did not only notice the poor people, but she chose to share the food she was bringing to her father with them. That was a good reason for her father to kill her, more specifically he hurt her leg with an axe and she died after losing too much blood. This would be the short story of her life.

Now, what does this have to do with the mission? One day, Deacon Theodore asked me what the name of the patron saint of Romania was; he needed the information for the Matins. He added that he was currently mentioning St Filofteia as the patron saint of Romania, since we already had her icon in the chapel and she was somehow part of our community. “St Filofteia is good”, I said, “but I think Romania has a different patron saint”. I knew about St Andrew the

Apostle, so I told Deacon Theodore that I would look into that. My instinctive reaction, who knows why, was to replace St Filofteia. Maybe I was trying to be politically or canonically, or both, correct. At the same time that didn’t feel quite right, but it didn’t change my intention. After a short time, I can’t really remember if it was during the same day or maybe a bit later, I

met with one of the volunteers at the mission. As many people from the mission, he had to do community hours as a result of a court order, but having finished his hours he kept coming at the mission out of his own will. He wanted to talk to me because he had been homeless for four months at that time, and he needed help getting some information about housing.

I think we talked for almost 40 minutes that day, but only 5 minutes about housing. He needed to discuss more important things about his life. I remember he told me his opinion about the long term impact that psych medication has on the human brain and eventually we spoke about one of the most important things in his life: his writings (novels and poems). At the end of the conversation he mentioned a piece of fictional writing that he was working on at that time. The story was taking place

sometime in the future, and it was centered around a tyrannical emperor. This emperor had a very kind daughter, who cared deeply about her people and she did things to help them against her father’s will. When the emperor finds out about his daughter’s actions, he kills her. At that moment I stopped him for a second and I asked “Could you please repeat that?” “The emperor kills his own daughter because she helps the people against his will”, he repeated. After asking more details about the story, I told him that we actually had a saint in our church with a similar life story, and her name was St Filofteia. He was a little bit surprised to hear that. I offered to show him the icon of the saint that we had in our chapel downstairs. As we did that, I continued giving him details about the saint’s story.

continued on p. 4



*Please remember the mission in your will.
You can't take it with you!
Memorial Meals offered in Memory of a loved one.
Call—Deacon Pawel at 416 466 1357 Ext: 25*

Summer Family Fun at St John's Mission

Summer is a time for being outdoors, a time for fun, a time to be with family. And St John's Mission has a whole summer of great activities and events planned for families to spend time together. We will be hosting a variety of family programs at the mission and around the neighbourhood (Joel Weeks Park, Riverdale Farm, Evergreen Brickworks).

There will be everything from gardening, arts & crafts, games, family dinners, cooking classes, picnics, community excursions and loads of engaging workshops for both adults and children to enjoy together. And the fun doesn't stop there-there will also be family weekend getaways at St Mary of Egypt Refuge, just 2.5 hours out of Toronto, in Tweed, Ontario. The weekends will focus on families reconnecting in the comforts of a well-equipped cottage/campground, but in the surroundings of nature's healing beauty and in the support of something infinitely larger than ourselves. Hiking, campfires, sing-a-longs, canoeing, swimming, gardening are just some of the great ways for families to spend time on their own or with other families.



Most programs are free of charge, and registration is needed as space is limited. Please refer to the monthly schedules posted on the mission's website under the Kettle of Fish Family programs sections for specific dates and registration. Please speak with Ashley in regards to joining us for a weekend getaway at St Mary of Egypt Refuge.

We are excited for the blessing of warmer weather and the opportunity of spending our summer with you and your family!

Ashley Grzybowski, Kettle of Fish Programs

T: 416-466-1357 Ext. 29, E: kofsjcm@gmail.com, W: stjohmission.org

continued from p. 3

There is no need to say that after this incident I changed my intention to replace St Filofteia in the Matins service. I also realized how relevant her life is for most of the people who spent an important part of their life at the mission. Obviously, her life is about caring and loving, and also about being practical in your love for people, and that remains with all of us. However, there is something special that maybe only the people who come to the mission could understand.

St Filofteia experienced a violent death. Many people at the mission experience all forms of violence in their life, from an early age, and sometimes throughout all their life. And there is no poetry with that. So I think what St Filofteia is showing us is that there is no way to go back or to remain tortured by violence, but violence can bring holiness in our life if we approach it with the heart of a 12 year old. If there is any meaning in the act of suffering, one must look for it in the resurrection.

Nicolaie Atitienei, MSW, RSW, MA Psych.



Paula Fletcher (left) our Toronto City Councillor came to congratulate Bodh (center) for all her great work and the graduates of St John's Academy for 2014. Also, Peter Tabuns (right) our Member of Provincial Parliament had some encouraging words for the graduates.



St John the Compassionate Mission

155 Broadview Ave. Toronto ON M4M 2E9 Tel: 416-466-1357 Fax: 416-466-3517 Charitable #89328 1832 RR0001

stjohmission@sympatico.ca www.stjohmission.org