



# ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER Christmas 2009

## Making Room for You!

This year will be my 23rd Christmas at St John the Compassionate Mission. **A lot has changed from the original, two-small-room drop-in centre on Blake St.** At our first Christmas, we all could fit around a table with room to spare, chapel the size of a closet, and the kitchen dubbed as an office and counselling room and at one point even a bakery. There was one door and the place would be so full of cigarette smoke you could hardly find it.

Today the Mission serves thousands throughout the year. At Christmas there will probably be only standing room. **A house next to the Mission fulfills the long dream of housing people who live the Mission in some form of community.** A full-fledged Bakery now has its own home and is open six days a week, 12-24 hours a day. Our Lived Theology School (offering internships in the type of work we do) is finally up and running. An academy for neighbourhood youth with youth activities is running full tilt. An apprenticeship program to teach people a job is in its final stages of development. Regular retreats out of the city are planned every month instead of once a year as in the beginning. A counselling service for families is established. In the winter we extend our open hours starting at 7 a.m. and going to 9 p.m. on weekends. Our community is served by a community advisory board made up of local people who meet and decide daily issues. This year we were nominated the best bakery in Toronto by NOW magazine. These are

some of the achievements of the last 23 years that I see. All this done on a shoestring budget and due to the amazing generosity of community volunteers.

Nonetheless, **some things never change**; such as, how will we afford to keep on extended hours during the winter months? For many drop-in community centres downsizing means laying off staff. **For us, it means choosing to turn off the heat, or the lights.** From a logistical point of view, what we are trying to live and do at St John's is impossible.

A friend who is CEO of a local Christian charity tells me **he** is worried about how to spend several million dollars. **We** worry how we can find money to pay for basics! There are many days when we simply go without. It is good for us also to know what it means to be poor.

Nonetheless, this year we, like everyone else, are feeling the loss of financial support. For us it means **that some basic needs are in jeopardy.** Your donations will help us keep the Mission doors open, especially after Christmas, in the bleak days of January and February. They will help heat the building. Your donations will help pay

the insurance and upkeep of the house for homeless men and women.

Christmas began when there was no room for that family of strangers from Galilee. Please help us this year continue to make room for those who are strangers in our city. R.R.



## Everything will be fine!

Years ago a very stupid little girl who thought she knew everything quit school in grade 10 to get married, less than a year later she was divorced. Then one afternoon she was sitting, once again, back in mother's house terrified for what lay ahead for her in life. She fell asleep after crying for a good part of the afternoon, in the dream she was still crying in her room but she felt someone else there with her. She lifted her face and turned her head to see the image of the Virgin Mary seem to gently flow across the room, she turned her head back to her and gently smiled and said, "do not worry everything will be fine". She awoke feeling like it felt more realistic than a normal dream; this dream would be as vivid today as the day she had it.

Within a year after that dream I got a great job that led to a very well paid and promising career, married a great man and bought a beautiful house in the good side of town. We were living the good life; we thought we had it all. I never thought I could turn my nose up so high, and still have my head buried so deep in the sand. I didn't see, and I didn't care.

Then it all fell apart, fast. First Jim's health started going downhill having had numerous heart attacks, my job got outsourced; we had to sell the house. We moved back to Toronto only to find my health starting to degrade, I was subsequently diagnosed with MS and severe depression, and Jim was still getting worse.

I started to doubt my faith, but being at St John's made me contemplate a little more about my doubts. Then I realized I hadn't really prayed until the first bad incident in my life happened. I was using God for my own selfish needs, when everything was up and going great where were my prayers of thanks, few and far between? I finally have my priorities straight, and I have MY meaning of the dream. I am lucky enough to still have my loving devoted husband of 34 years that I love more today than the day we married, and many friends at St. John's that show me more love than I've felt from some of my closest friends.

To this day I can still see the smile on her beautiful face when she turned her head and said those words. The wealth we have is not in our pockets, today I am happy in heart, mind, and soul, I once again have it all, and I'm broke!

My head is now at eye level, now I see; now I care; now I try to give back because nobody knows where we will be tomorrow.

Judy Ward



## St. Xenia's: Haven and Home.

St Xenia's is a Home - not just housing, or a room; but a place of solitude, a place where you can be yourself, where you can let your guard down and be at peace. This is what many people living in so called public housing lack. They live in fear; fear of disreputable neighbours, bedbugs and in deplorable sub-standard accommodation.

This fall, St. John's has made an attempt, maybe a small one, but one nonetheless, at combating this hidden

poverty. On Friday, October 2nd, St. Xenia house was blessed, starting a new era at St. John the Compassionate Mission. The residents are given a room and an opportunity to be a family; to live, cook and clean together. Practically beside the Mission, this will allow people to be part of St. John's community, to belong, be needed and hopefully heal their brokenness. Most of the residents have moved in and are starting the process of forming a community. We are incredibly excited for this venture, and can't wait to see where this leads us!

Michael Luciuk (LTS Intern)

## About our New Community Board President

Shawn grew up in London Ontario in a loving family of three brothers, one sister and a great mother. After leaving London at the age of 19, Shawn earned a Musical Theatre Degree at Sheridan College. After many years of work in the Theatre industry, Shawn fell back to his first love, Golf. While managing restaurants for a few years, he earned enough money and put in enough practice to get his Golf Instructors Certificate. He then taught golf while managing a Golf store in downtown Toronto. Everything was going his way until the demons of addiction took control of his life and everything went downhill. After a few years of helplessness and being too proud to turn to his worried family, Shawn found St John's. He recalls the first time entering the Mission. Three words came to mind – Warm, Trusting and Compassionate. "I couldn't believe the sense of community", Shawn recalls. After a few years volunteering for the Mission and getting his life on track, Shawn became more involved with the Mission. A few of his jobs now include Public Relations Manager (liaison with the City of Toronto), Winter Nights Coordinator, and President of the Community Advisory Board.



"I would like to take this opportunity to thank St. John's for its many blessings. I could not have done it without you. Love Shawn Burk"



Music and fun at the Appreciation Night for Volunteers and Staff 2009.

## I couldn't resist the humour!

A man, down on his luck, went into a church which catered to the "uppity". Spotting the man's dirty clothes a deacon, worried about the church's image, went to the man and asked him if he needed help. The man said, "I was praying and the Lord told me to come to this church."

The deacon suggested that the man go pray some more and possibly he might get a different answer. The next Sunday the man returned. The deacon asked, "Did you get a different answer?"

The man replied, "Yes I did. I told the Lord that they don't want me in that church and the Lord said, 'Don't worry about it son; I've been trying to get into that church for years and haven't made it yet.'"  
"The Sub"

## From Nova Scotia to Toronto

Patricia McAskill was born in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. She came to Canada when she was 5 years old. Throughout her life she worked in several places like a Photo Shop and precision die cutting.

Pat was retired after suffering from two heart attacks and after the death of her mother and brother in the space of four months, she was devastated. It was coming to the Mission and helping out that kept Pat from despair.

Pat has been volunteering two days a week for the last six years; an example, of devotion, dedication and generosity, trusting the hearts of the brothers and sisters who come to the mission with great respect. In turn Pat says, "that she loves working and enjoys meeting all the people who come to the Mission."

There is nobility to all that Pat does and it is thanks to people like her that the humiliation that often comes by having to "eat at a Mission" is turned to a real human encounter that has dignity and beauty.





Christine



*Merry Christmas  
to all our  
St John's Family*



Judy, Carole-Ann, Christine

## Winter Program

Hello Friends!

Very soon December will be upon us. With it comes St. John's annual Winter Program. The Winter Program is, in a nutshell, extended hours. By way of having longer hours, St. John's Mission has succeeded (there is evidence) in reducing the number of (reported) freezing deaths in the Mission's neighbourhood to NONE since the Winter program has commenced. We can be very thankful for that.

St. John's Mission keeps people inside after shelters kick people out at the oh-so-early, cold and dark hour of 7:00am and then until shelters open up again for the night; one of the few places of warmth in the gap left by agencies and shelters. We find places for people to stay for the night. We keep warm. We play games, drink way too much coffee. Serve food. Eat food. Sometimes we'll even have fun! We talk with each other. And listen to each other. We pray. We get to know each other. We are vehicles of love and compassion to each other and in some cases we are a life-line to our friends who are lonely and depressed. It's hard to really know what all we may be to another person when we open ourselves to God for Him to use as He will. It is completely up to Him.

It costs only \$75 per person for the whole four months of the Winter Program. We will have to rely heavily on our donors and helpers this winter, to keep St. John's running. Thank you, in advance, to all those who support our Winter program.

If you can give hands-on help you can contact me at [stjohnandmaria@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnandmaria@gmail.com) or at 416-465-5205 (the LTS house).  
Naomi Funk (LTS Intern)

### The Winter Program hours are:

Monday – Friday: 7am-9am Saturday: 11am-2pm  
Friday, Saturday & Sunday: 4:30pm-9:00pm



Naomi and Michael (Lived Theology School Interns)

This is how your donation works out when you fill out your Income Tax.

	Income Range			
	\$36,848 - \$73,698		above \$73,698	
Your Gift of	Total Tax Savings	Actual Cost to You	Total Tax Savings	Actual Cost to You
\$100.00	\$21.05	\$78.95	\$24.44	\$75.56
\$200.00	\$42.10	\$157.90	\$48.88	\$151.12
\$500.00	\$162.58	\$337.42	\$190.10	\$309.90
\$1,000.00	\$363.38	\$636.62	\$422.15	\$577.85
\$5,000.00	\$1,969.78	\$3,030.22	\$2,278.54	\$2,721.46

*Tax Receipts are issued at the end of the fiscal year.*

## St John the Compassionate Mission

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