



# ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

## Christmas 2010

## CHRISTMAS MIRACLES! MAKING ROOM!

We all like to think that miracles can happen! Christmas is often seen as a time of miracles. And they mostly still do occur I would say daily if not hourly but mostly unnoticed. Like on August 1<sup>st</sup> when we burned our mortgage 15 years ahead of schedule!

- Or like the day Dino appeared and offered to help us with building repairs for free after we had been turned down for funding by the city.

- Or the fact that in spite of endless crises, the bakery still manages to make bread.

- Or the day when Linda produced a tub of fresh butter, from cartons of outdated organic whipping cream.

- Or the conversation, that breaks your heart with a man who never before opened his mouth.

- Or the couple who live in a depressing basement telling you that they never felt so much respect and love before in their lives.

- Or Both the new Director of the Academy, found by Jeannie who babysat her children.

- Or the meals prepared everyday by Linda and Edward.

- Or the day Tom finally cut decades of old hair locks and changed his shirt.

- Or the lamp we needed just appears at our door one morning.

- Or that no has killed Luc, in spite of his annoying monotone voice.

- Or that we have not closed shop in spite of the little money that often comes in during the summer months.

- Or the offer for a walk-in fridge, when we had just said that we could never afford one.

These are just a few of the so called ordinary miracles. What is common to all of them is that they keep us deeply grounded in a spirit of gratefulness and attention.

The truth is not found in statistics, polls or Hollywood movies but in the daily moments where the infinite hides in the ordinary. When we welcome life in this simple way, then we, truly, make room at the Inn not only for

the homeless and the poor but most of all for God.

*Fr Roberto Ubertino*



**Did you know** that you can give a gift of Securities (stocks and mutual funds) directly to St. John the Compassionate and gain greater tax benefits? For more information, please call us at the Mission, and ask for Rudina.



## GIRLS' RETREAT - The Sisterhood of the Travels

There were four of us girls, we had always known each other from babyhood. We were all very different. We found these jeans and to our utter amazement, they fit us all! It was as if the pants had found us... Oops, wrong story!

There were six of us girls, and some of us knew each other, but none of us knew most of the others. Our main connection to each other was through St John's Academy, as most of us had been tutored through that program. We met each other in the basement of St John the Compassionate Mission.

In good faith, we piled into cars and headed off to the wilds of Ontario, up to St Mary of Egypt Refuge. Trusting that our leaders had the details under control, we relaxed and enjoyed the ride.

Upon arrival, we spilled out and explored the rapids, swam in the river, splashed about in the pool. All the while, our leaders discovered that they had left the movie we planned our retreat discussion around, back at the mission! Mary diligently called around to every librarian and movie expert she knew. Johan, still in Toronto, scurried about to pick up the original film choice and get up to the Refuge at his allotted time. Mary eventually tracked down three options, and picked up the movies, one of which was... Sisterhood of the Travel Pants!

The movie was perfect! It allowed us to start exploring basic identity questions: Who am I? What am I scared of? What do I like about me? What do I wonder about me? It was as if the movie had found us.

For the next two days, we discussed much about ourselves and each other! We conquered fears, of water with leaches, trying new things, walking through a graveyard at night, being by ourselves for short periods of time. We learned to start a small fire, enough to boil water. We oriented around the woods, learned to tie knots, worked as a team to complete a challenge. We spent time on our own, thinking about who we are, and shared of our selves in group discussions.

We ate a vast variety of marshmallows, and other slightly healthier options. We loved playing Invictus in the dark, stargazing in the graveyard, staying up late and dancing with glow sticks!

By the time we returned to the parking lot of St John the Compassionate Mission we were changed. While we remained very different, while we still hadn't known each other since babyhood, we had our lives bound together in the unique and irreparable way that only a retreat at the Refuge can achieve.



*"Renewing old friendships and making new ones; an experience fortified by natural surroundings."*



*"Many a rock bass was caught and released during our girl's camp - new experience for many."*

*Sharon Helleman*

## A Good Time Was Had By All

On Sat. Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>, St. John's Mission honoured its volunteers with a HOEDOWN; a wonderful evening of music, dance and food. To set the mood a country and western band including 2 amazing fiddlers entertained the guests, most of whom wore cowboy hats. They 'sashayed' and 'dosadoed' to the calls of the dance M.C. The adults, and especially the children, wore faces of pure pleasure as they learned the hoedown dance steps along with their partner.

Fr. Roberto, Deacon Pawel, Nicole and Shawn took turns calling up each of the volunteers, and telling us how that person's contribution makes such a difference to the success of St. John's Mission. Each volunteer was given a certificate and a small gift of appreciation. How wonderful to honour the people who give of themselves to St. John's.

We feasted on a meal of country-fried chicken, donated by *George Kastanas of Chicken N Joy*, along with corn on the cob, salad and more. This of course was followed with more dancing! *Maries St. Paul*



Mother Sofia and Sofia



## St. Xenia's House Update: One Really Crowded House

St. Xenia's House has been going through a transformation as of late. In the past six months we have had three residents move to more independent living situations. Due to changing circumstances, the house was opened up to men. The house quickly filled up and now we have six people, 5 men and 1 woman living at St. Xenia's. Part of this change was the decision by the Mission to take a more daily role in establishing community. This has involved my moving into the house to help create a home from within. This is as simple as dealing with personal disputes, cooking meals for everyone, and interacting individually on a day-to-day basis. I believe community can not be imposed but rather shown. Many of the people that live at St. Xenia's have never had to live with others, other than a possible parental situation, before. Even I often realize that I am contributing to failure through my own concerns, fears and inadequacies.

This makes for a crowded home, and to make it even more crowded, the dreaded B.B's have returned. (Please key in ominous music.) So once again I have been battling the bed bugs, spraying, cleaning, and washing. Luckily the effect has been localized on one room and the house has come together to deal with it. Everyone is pitching in, from caulking the floorboards, to painting the bed white, to meticulously cleaning the room. It is wonderful to see people seeing beyond their own concerns, to work as a family and help someone less able. This doesn't mean that it's perfect -- people bring their own vision of how the house should work -- ones that often don't gel with others, do not fit into but rather directly clash with the others. The house has never been cleaner. But working through these is what makes St. Xenia's so important. It can be tough, people still have the frustrating ability of eating in the same room and not saying more than six words, and I still wake up at night thinking I feel bed bugs crawling over me, but all one can do is be present and live through it together. *Michael Luciuk (one of our first graduates of the Lived Theology School)*





## More than Feeding Families

I came to St. John the Compassionate Mission this past September for an opportunity to volunteer and get involved outside of school. This semester had promised to be a challenging one and volunteering once a week would make for a good change of pace; the break from routine would be a much needed break from reality. For the last two months I had the pleasure to be a part of the “Food for Families” program run by the Mission on Wednesday afternoons.

The “Food for Families” program serves anywhere from 12 – 24 families a week. At first glance, it seems very similar to a food bank where families in need can come and pick up free groceries, everything from non-perishable food items to fresh produce. During my short time at the Mission and through my involvement with this program, I have had the opportunity to

take a closer look and really understand what the family programs at St. John the Compassionate Mission are all about.

Taking part in the “Food for Families” program, I have seen families come in with more than just their needs and leave with more than just groceries. The program is set up in such a way that each family is allotted individual time to come in, choose the groceries they need, and spend some time with us. This allows an opportunity for some dialogue and a real person-to-person interaction. In that time we are able to just be with the families, exchanging genuine smiles and genuine expressions of love and taking the time to get to know them on a more personal basis.

The Mission also provides several other programs for families including Wednesday night family dinner,

“Adopt a Family” Christmas program, and “Family Activity Night” which is scheduled to begin Saturday, November 27<sup>th</sup>.

I came to St. John the Compassionate because I thought I had something to give and quickly found that I was receiving much more than what I had to offer. My interactions with the families and everyone at the Mission are unique. There is often a mutual exchange of vulnerability that I do not get to experience to the same extent outside St. John the Compassionate Mission. Many of those who come to the Mission in need have filled some of my deepest hunger that I had long left unacknowledged. What I had initially thought would be my weekly escape from reality has been an experience more real than almost any other.

Angela Salama

Bill, Misty and baby Zack



### CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

- Dried Beans & Lentils
- Tuna & Salmon
- Soups & Stews
- Diced Tomatoes
- Canned Fruit Salad
- Baked Beans
- Peanut Butter & Jam
- Cereal (hot & cold)
- Eggs
- Pancake Mix & Maple Syrup
- Cookies & Biscuits
- Condiments & Seasonings
- Tea & Coffee
- Cooking Oil
- Margarine
- Fresh Fruit & Vegetables
- Milk (fresh & powdered)
- Diapers (infant to adult)
- Feminine Sanitary Pads
- Clean Towels

#### Your Cash Gifts Will Provide:

|  |        |                                   |         |
|--|--------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Christmas meal with all the trimmings: | \$3.25 | Christmas meal for a table of 10: | \$32.50 |
|--|--------|-----------------------------------|---------|

Donations can be made by calling Rudina (accounting): 416-466-1357

### St. John the Compassionate Mission

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