



# ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER Spring-Lent 2012



Jeannie with Jean Vanier at St John's

“This is the Fast the Lord Desires  
to share your Bread with the Hungry,  
Open your homes to the homeless Door,  
Remove the yoke of Injustice,  
Let the Oppressed go Free.”



# Teaching for the Love of It



For the last 2 years I have volunteered for St. John's Academy as a mentor. Doing this work is a highlight of my week. It's so rewarding to work with students who wish to improve their studies in English and / or Math. These children all attend regular classes during the day; and then come to St. John's Academy after school once, or for some students, twice a week. The Academy accepts students from grades 6 to 9 who need help with their current year of study. There is a maximum of 2 students per tutor.

Most of the students who attend the Academy live in the neighbourhood and are recent immigrants to Canada. Their parents, wishing to provide their children with every opportunity available to them, send their children here to receive the additional help they need academically. They are usually from India, Sri Lanka, and parts of Africa, and for many of them, English is a 2<sup>nd</sup> language. Most of them take their studies seriously, and it is obvious from the attitude of these students, their parents are eager for them to succeed.

Our books and materials have been purchased using the money donated to the Academy. Additionally, some companies have donated new up-to-date teaching materials, books and dictionaries. These new materials enhance the teaching process; and I really enjoy the mini-books which are full of interesting, fast paced stories that keep these adolescents focused.

The mentors are professionals who come after work to share their love of learning with their students. They provide each student an opportunity to work at their pace (rather than trying to keep up with the whole class), and, far more importantly, to learn in an environment where they are treated with respect and are encouraged to gain confidence in areas where they may be feeling inadequate. We mentors are blessed to have Bodh Sarawati as our Director. She does a great job assessing the students, communicating with the parents, preparing our teaching plans and materials – in other words, she wears many hats, and does an excellent job.

This role gives much back to me. I have learned about my students' cultures which, for many, are imbedded in their religion. Also, to see how motivated and focused these students are is to understand how much most Canadian students take their education for granted. And, at the end of each term, I can see the improvements made by each student, and know that I played a part in the child's success.

M. St Paul



Maries with students



Julio & Joy's Leaving Party

## Memorial Meals Eternal Memory!

We are grateful to those who have offered a meal to the poor in memory of a loved one. On the day the meal is offered a notice is posted informing those who come to the meal for whom and by whom it is offered. If desired, a short memorial service precedes the meal. If you wish to offer a memorial meal, please contact the Mission.



Hugo Roman-Cruz from St John's buried 9/12/2012



The city wants to charge the Mission for Garbage Pick-up. This extra expense could close down our Meal Program. Call Ford and tell him why it is not good business to do this.

## Wait! Did you say 'garbage'?

Everyone knows what a soup kitchen is, what it does and who it helps. We all know that they're run by volunteers; students, adults, and seniors. During major holidays we're all expected to donate to them because they're in need of food and that's how we demonstrate that we're being good citizens...right?

Well, maybe in a perfect world the homeless, jobless, and those living on welfare or compensation only eat during the holiday seasons, but in reality they require food *all* year round.

This past winter, I took the time to volunteer at St. John the Compassionate Mission's soup kitchen. I worked with volunteers of all kinds. I learned a lot about a *lot* of things and a lot of people, some of which I would like to share with you.

Unfortunately the general public knows very little about these types of community projects and how they survive to do their work; they are taken for granted. The only thing we ever hear regarding social programs is the *incredibly important funding* our Mayor Rob Ford is greedily taking away from them.

*...Something's definitely wrong with this...*

Let me shine a little light on some of the remarkable things that a very small mission accomplishes in the heart of downtown. For twenty five years St. John's soup kitchen, not much larger than our *small* cafeteria, serves over 30,000 meals per year! This in turn saves the government roughly \$200,000.00 annually by providing meals 5-7 times per week! "This *financial* contribution by our community does not include the staff and volunteer time that has been generously donated by the mission to the Mayoral Office by delivering essential services (food is an essential service!) at no cost to the City for 25 years" Rev. Roberto Ubertino, Executive Director of St. John the Compassionate Mission



Per meal, roughly a hundred people are served - sometimes many more, sometimes less. Sadly for many it all depends on when their welfare cheques last came in. It's often much busier at the end of the month than the beginning.

This particular mission receives approximately \$17,000.00 in funding per year to *fully function*. \$17,000 is less than the average income of a Canadian home which serves on average four members. *This home* serves over 1,200. Funding has to cover all the running costs. As an added bonus for the past **25** years, the garbage collection has been free! Unfortunately, Rob Ford thinks that 'garbage' collection is giving *too much* to the community. This decision will cost the mission approximately \$15,000 annually. "The war on the poor by Ford is hard to justify from a business perspective." – Rev. Roberto Ubertino

So, how does this all really work? The food cycle through these soup kitchens works on a different system than the food that goes through our homes and cafeteria.

Whose garbage is it really? Is it The Mission's because they've taken the initiative to prevent the waste of perfectly good food? The Mission receives boxes of produce and in sorting them has to throw out sometimes half of it because it's not entirely usable, and also has to get rid of the packaging. The Mission is the one saving the government hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. Or is it the grocery stores' because they chose to get rid of perfectly good food and hand it off to people to deal with it as they have to maintain a 'perfect food only' reputation?

Next time you're going to take more food than you'll eat, seriously consider the number of people living in your city, attending your school, playing on the same sports team as you, who don't have the means to get by and rely on these program.

Emilija Lafond



# Aren't We Forgetting Someone?

An Open Letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty

We have accepted a model of society that is made up of those who are productive and those who for different reasons are beneficiaries of the common wealth. The fact is that all pay taxes (direct and indirect) regardless of the origin of their income. People on welfare have the stigma of living off the hard work of others. A welfare system that asks nothing in return has created a generational phenomenon of dependency. The stark reality is that many people on social assistance will never be able to look for or keep a job if they even found one. There is a significant group of people in Ontario who will never be able to be “productive” in the narrow definition of the market place. Nonetheless, these same people do have skills that can contribute to a better more humane society. These same non-marketable people can make a difference in the lives of neighbourhoods and individuals including those who are deemed “productive”.

Society should not just be creating jobs and leave behind those who cannot hold down any job. Work is not just an economic necessity but a deeply human need. It gives meaning to life. It contributes to better health and a more vibrant social fiber.

Most of the people who volunteer at our Mission would be from the group that this government is now attempting to cut their travel allowance. Like “Jane”, for example, who is extremely shy and on anti-psychotic medication. Her coming to the Mission forces her out of the house. She has to dress well and with us she also eats well. Recently she was contemplating cutting her lithium dosage herself. Because she trusts us she spoke openly about it and accepted our advice not to do this without first talking to her doctor. If Jane’s travel allowance is cut and she stays alone at home her condition will deteriorate. How much will it cost society for her inevitable hospitalization? What a loss

also for others who benefit from her work in feeding working poor families who come to the Mission where she volunteers.

“Nasreen” is a refugee from Iraq who lives with a mentally ill sister who also comes to the Mission. For Nasreen the Mission gives a sense of belonging and keeps her “sane”. If the government cuts her \$100 allowance she will not be able to come and be our first point of contact for those who come to us 4 days a week. She will stay at home with her ill sister, with who knows what effect on her own health.

“Natalie” is a single mother of two grown children and lives on her own. Prior to coming to the Mission she was a stay at home depressive. She is now running a program for homeless people; because she knows what homelessness is. Her reward- \$100 per month. The same service run by a government agency would require a “professional” staff at a much higher cost. Natalie contributes to society by making the Riverdale neighbourhood a place that is truly inclusive. No study or army of social workers would achieve what she does. Nevertheless she has no marketable skills. By being off medication since finding a purpose in life she has saved money for our health care. Total cost to society - \$100 a month.

For the last 25 years we have seen first hand what contributions to society people with no marketable skills have made to society. Not only is it a scandal to think that we are contemplating removing the option to volunteer, when in fact the honest and just thing to do would be to actually pay them as we pay the vast army of social workers and community services that society seems to accept as necessary. Paid volunteering for someone on OW should be a right based on the human right to have a meaningful life, based on the fact that human beings need to give and not just to receive.

For most “productive” members of society that will listen to this presentation \$100 is a dinner for two. For people on OW \$100 represents a significant percentage of their income. It represents whether you go hungry or not. Of all the money the government spends I would venture to say that the \$100 given to volunteers represents the best buy for your buck that exists. It

- saves money on health care
- saves money on police services
- contributes to society in a way that the so-called “productive members” can never get around to

And, above all, it helps make this society one that our children will want to be part of and proud of.

Fr Roberto Ubertino  
Executive Director

Additional Note:

The original intention of the additional \$100 for volunteering was to allow OW recipients to be able to buy a monthly TTC Metro Pass which the individual could use to seek employment. This intention has been surpassed by the simple fact that this Metro Pass now costs \$126 and no corresponding increase in the allowance has been made. This is an old political maneuver to decrease the value of a benefit with the intention of phasing it out quietly.



Raymond



## A Student's Eye View

**M**y name is Julie Areghan. I am from Nigeria in West Africa. I immigrated to Canada two and a half years ago with my family (My Husband and our four children).

I worked in the Nigerian Navy for twenty three years when I was in Nigeria and on getting to Canada; I had to switch to a completely different direction by starting a program in Social Service Work which deals with immigration and refugees precisely. One might want to ask, why social work? I picked social work because even when I worked in the Nigerian Navy, I was always having the urge to help and encourage other people with different situations and challenges. Making enquiries about Social Service Work, I saw it as being the best place for me to be. I also picked it because Social Service Work is all about giving out help to the needy, with the various situations and challenges as the case may be irrespective of their age, sex, religion, ethnicity etc.

At St John the Compassionate Mission I am involved in caring for everyone that enters through the doors that is in need of Social Services.

As a Social Service Worker in placement at St John's Mission, my responsibilities are to chat with the clients that come into St John's Mission on a day to day basis about their situation, the reason they come to St John's Mission, if they are getting the help they actually need, if yes, how much do they appreciate this help? If not, which other way do they think St John's can help them? The client response in this regard, will define the next line action. If the help is in St John's Mission then of course they are given help otherwise they are referred to where they can get help.

So far, the majority of the clients are happy with St John's Services, particularly the lunch, dinner and Food for Families Program. They are also very happy and appreciative of the Christmas Program that the Mission organizes.

In conclusion, my mission at St John's is to put what I've been taught in class to practice helping and encouraging people with different situations and challenges but allowing them to make their own decisions.



Julie



## Another St John's Bakery Story

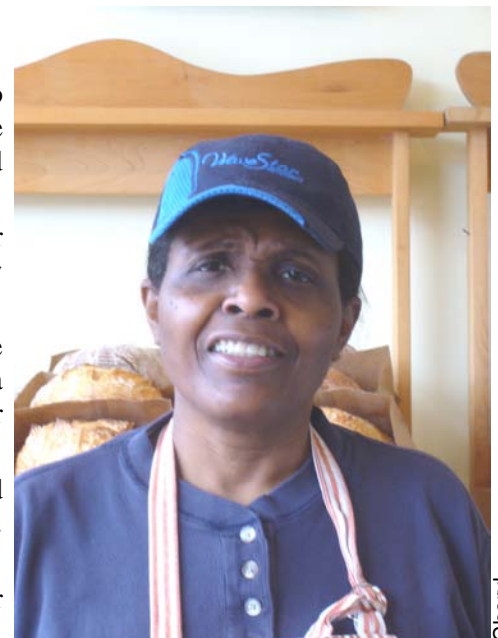
**I**n the summer of 2011, Cheryl Persad was sitting in her bed thinking of what to do with her life. Her personal business was hit hard by the economy and she was looking for a complete change. At the time, Cheryl was on Ontario Works and was struggling with what direction she wanted to take.

Well, as a child growing up in Trinidad, Cheryl helped her Mother with her baking business. Now, thinking back on those days, Cheryl thought of somehow getting back into baking. But How?

After consolidating with her Ontario Works Officer, Cheryl was given the phone number of St John's Bakery. This way, she could get experience and gain a bit of extra money if she put in Volunteer Hours. After waiting on a waiting list for a few months, Cheryl walked through our doors.

It was clear to everyone at the Bakery, Cheryl had a work ethic that was second to none. In only a few short months, Cheryl was offered a position at the bakery. The answer she desperately needed that day she sat on her bed.

Shawn Burk – Bakery Administrator



Cheryl

## A Volunteer Speaks

I had been asked to write about my experience at St John's and the one thing that stood out for me was the word community. I was born and raised just outside of St Catherines where I was used to waving at fellow drivers at stop signs, and saying hello to people you met on the streets. Where you were involved in the community and without each other you could not brave the bad times and enjoy the good times. When I moved to Toronto eleven years ago. I felt I had lost that sense of community and belonging.

I had lived in several different neighbourhoods in Toronto over the years and finally settled in Leslieville. I love this area and the different people in it, but the one thing I felt I was still lacking was that element of community, until I came to St John's. As soon as I first walked in out of the cold and was hit with the smell of Julio's soup and the warm atmosphere, I knew I found it.

I appreciate not only what this place does for the community but also what it has done for me. I've enjoyed working alongside all the volunteers and getting to know all the people that have come through the Mission. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction knowing the people I see on the street because I've met them at the Mission, and I look forward to building on the relationships here.

All of us have been brought to St John's for different reasons but I hope that we all can walk away having that sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Sandra Bylsma



Sandra with Junior

## Important Visitors

On Thursday, Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, St. John's hosted 14 visitors from the JVS Toronto, Al Green Resource Centre, which specializes in creating employment, training and volunteer opportunities for persons with development disabilities to assist them to develop work, life and social skills. Ms. Brunilda Rizvanolli, Workforce Specialist and Ms. Nikki Woolley, Mental Health Worker for Youth Community Choices for Success led the team of young adults on a journey across town to visit and learn more about the Mission. Opportunities for volunteering at the Mission were explained to the group. The highlight of the tour was visiting our Bakery and sampling some of the delicious cookies we produce.



Janeth with Family, one of our best volunteers for the Food for Families Program

*From Nov.-Mar. the Mission serves Breakfast Mon-Fri from 5:30am-9:00am to the homeless. Here is the story from one of the volunteers.*

**M**y name is Miquel and I'm from Barcelona, Spain and I'm working as a volunteer at the Mission's breakfast program and also at the Thrift Store. Since I've arrived in Toronto, what really has surprised me is how the Canadian society is actively involved in volunteering programs and I wouldn't like to lose the chance of being part of this amazing movement. Sadly Spaniards are not involved in volunteering programs as Canadians are. In Barcelona I used to work as a volunteer teaching Catalan, my mother tongue, to new comers. What I like the most of working as a volunteer, is how appreciative people are and also the fact of helping them.

All the programs at the Mission are indispensable to help people to have a better quality of life and I'm proud of being part of this project. Since I'm working as a volunteer I've met fascinating people who are sharing their spare time helping others and fascinating people who really appreciate what we're doing for them. This is the world in which I'd like to see growing up my kids.

Miquel Nin i Vallès

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