

# ST. JOHN

THE COMPASSIONATE  
MISSION



Newsletter • Autumn 2024



*A word from Father Nicolaie Atitienei,  
Executive Director of St. John's Mission*

### No More Indifference to Life

The temptation for our eyes to contemplate empty things is growing. And what is emptier than a quarrel between people? It is empty because we see it create a great gulf between us. It triggers death within the life on which the gift of immortality has been bestowed. The divisiveness among us is great, and paying attention to it has become an irresistible force.

Despite this, with our hearts we can still see reality as it is. The heart has no place to hide. The heart must love and endure everything in silence. Remember, it is our eyes that contemplate unnecessary things. The attraction for the eyes to pay attention to divisiveness creates a personal emptiness in us, a mirror that reflects the fracture between us.

In a way, this explains the dissatisfaction we feel today with our own selves. And with our own world, and with everything that goes on around us. This dissatisfaction comes from inside, and it can lead to a type of hate that bears no good fruits. On the contrary, it is destructive, because it originates in something untrue. Listening to lies murmured in our ears within our generalized divisiveness makes one's heart doubtful of the truth. We lose trust in what is good, what is beautiful, and what opens us to life. We are doubtful that communion can happen, and so we are shy when the Word of God visits us. We can barely recognize Him, because He bears in Himself the mark of neglect and rejection. The mark of indifference of eyes that contemplate the emptiness of a postmodern time that cannot make peace with itself. Our neighbor has become our enemy, and we are afraid.

The healing of this hatred from within needs the presence of the life of the other, for the gift that we have in each other, and for the gift upon which our gaze never rests. The gift of a life that has been hurt with indifference is about to bring this healing in us. Because no life is indifferent, and the healing of our own hate is its proof.

The spirit of divisiveness makes us think we are alone, and cornered within ourselves. In reality, many witnesses are

around us, people who open up to life, and have a genuine desire to commit to the beauty of truth. Empty as we may think we are, we have a place among them. We were gifted over the summer to have this experience of communion with different kinds of people from all parts of the world. A communion that happened around the truth. A brotherhood in the making that looks for Christ, who really is among us.

After the witness we received over the summer, we feel called to open more to life as a community. To become a witness for those through whom the Spirit of Truth is working and bearing good fruits. To become a witness for

those who bring to us the gift of communion through the wounds they have inherited. The spirit of divisiveness had not been kind to them. Yet, they prevail, and they come with hope toward us.

— *Fr. Nicolaie*

### Is Anyone Listening?

In a Mission parking spot, a man stands almost naked, ECG wires hanging off his chest, surrounded by a nurse and a troop of police. He is screaming, and gesticulating.

Into my mind comes something from Catholic and Orthodox publications: 'What do Patriarch Kyrill and U.S. Senator Chris Murphy have in common, besides that they both are part of powers that would use nuclear weapons even if it means the end of civilization?' They both—correctly I believe—say we are in a metaphysical battle for the soul of man. They both point to the necessity of faith to heal what seems a universal cancer eating away at the very basis for any social and human life.

...see *'Immense suffering,' page 5*



## ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE MISSION

info@stjohnsmmission.org • www.stjohnsmmission.org

416-466-1357 • Facebook stjcm

155 Broadview Avenue, Toronto, ON M4M 2E9

Charity #893281832RR0001



An apostolate of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese  
of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

©2024 St. John the Compassionate Mission



## New this fall – 'Project Anna and Simeon'

We cordially invite you to join us at the Mission Wednesday, November 6, 2024, from 6:30–8:30 p.m., to consider the current legislation and social implications regarding 'MAiD' in Canada. We will hear from our guest speaker, Dr. John Berkman, followed by discussion and compline.

Join us again two weeks after, on Wednesday, November 20, 2024, from 5:00–8:30 p.m., when the Mission will host a mini-retreat for those grieving a personal loss through MAiD. Supper will be provided, followed by a guest speaker, Father Luis Santi, a shared reflection, and a memorial service. The evening will be free of charge, but good-will offerings can receive a tax receipt. Please register in advance, by e-mail to [info@stmarysrefuge.org](mailto:info@stmarysrefuge.org), or phone 613-473-2679.

These evenings are offered through collaboration of St. John's Mission, Compassionate Community Care, Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, and St. Mary's Refuge.

## Staff Announcement

We are pleased to announce the appointment of our *starosta* Miroslava (pictured right) as the Mission's new office manager at the beginning May. She's a recent retiree from the financial and banking world, and the mother of two.



This follows Rudina's departure from the Mission in early March of this year.

In related office news, receipts for donations to the Mission will be issued electronically rather than through postal mail. We are grateful for your generosity, and hope this will make your and our record-keeping a little easier. Miroslava can be reached at 416-466-1357 or [finance@stjohnsmisson.org](mailto:finance@stjohnsmisson.org).

## Finding a Home and a Family at St. John's Mission

My journey with St. John the Compassionate in Toronto began unexpectedly. It was my second day in Canada, and I was feeling lost and uncertain, struggling to find shelter in a new country where I knew no one.

While passing by the Mission, I felt a pull to go inside for a moment of prayer. Little did I know that this small decision would change the course of my life.

Upon entering, I was warmly welcomed by Father Nicolaie and Brother Luke. They greeted me with such kindness and genuine concern, asking about my life and my struggles. I opened up about my situation, and without hesitation, they offered me not just a place to stay, but a home—a place where I felt safe, supported, and cared for.

Since then, I have been volunteering at the Mission, finding joy and purpose in giving back to the community that has given me so much. My work includes constructing wooden shelves for the library, and other handy tasks that are needed around the building. These tasks may seem simple, but through them, I have found a sense of belonging and fulfillment.

St. John's Mission has truly shaped my life. The community has embraced me, offering friendship, guidance, and support when I needed it most. It's hard to express how much this means to me, and hard to name everyone who has touched my life at the Mission, but I am especially grateful to Father Nicolaie, Brother Luke, and Mirela, who have been a constant source of encouragement and care.

As I look to the future, I am committed to continuing my service at St. John's for many more years. This community has become my family, and I am thankful every day for the opportunity to be part of something so special.

— Restom

## A New Community

My name is Biruk, and I'm from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. I graduated in Industrial Engineering in 2014. I'm from a big family—six sisters and one brother. So, all my life, I've been surrounded by people, including my

friends. So, when I decided to immigrate to Canada last May, I knew the ‘individual-oriented’ way of life awaiting me would be a challenge. I thought I was mentally prepared for it. But after my arrival, before I knew it I was slowly drowning in the pit of loneliness and boredom.

Fortunately, a person from St. John’s Mission suggested I volunteer. I joined in December 2023. That turned out to be the nicest thing that has happened since I came to Canada. I was received with kindness, and I was impressed with the constant hospitality given to everyone in the community.

I’ve met many amazing people from different countries, including my own. Things started to change for the better, and I had the opportunity to move to Lourmel House last January, for which I’m very grateful.

I spent the summer volunteering to drive people up to St. Mary’s Refuge, and I had the chance to spend time in that astonishingly peaceful place. The shared responsibilities, dedication, and effort that are put into work there will stay with me, as well as the simplicity of the way of life, irrespective of one’s identity.

### Something Found

I didn’t come to St. John’s Mission expecting to be received as a catechumen. And yet, as God wills it, this happened on September 16, 2024.

I come from the Quaker faith tradition, in large part because of my belief in the presence of the “Light of Christ” in each person, and the commitment to non-violence this belief entails. I was looking, quite simply, for an opportunity to put my faith into action. I discovered St. John’s on-line, thanks to the efforts of Brother Luke on the Catholic Worker web site. I have long admired the Catholic Worker—the intensity of their devotion and their commitment to the poor, their living out of the essential truths of Catholic Social Teaching—and I was looking for something similar in the city of Toronto. As it turned out, I found myself living only a few minutes’ walk from St. John’s.

I began volunteering: washing dishes in the kitchen for the 5 a.m. breakfast shift, serving meals, and—eventually—performing in community theatre productions (as both St. Peter and St. Paul!). At St. Mary’s Refuge, I had the chance to speak about my experiences with peacemaking, and, perhaps more importantly, to participate more fully in community life. Since then, I’ve helped with renovating some new apartments. I’ve read deeply on life at St. John’s. I’m greatly moved by the writings of Father Nicolaie, as well as by the witness of the Catholic spiritual movement, Pain de Vie, a sister community of St. John’s.

As I continued to volunteer, I felt drawn more and more to participate in the liturgical life of the Mission—to draw nearer to its eucharistic heart. I eventually reached a point at which I felt as though, after much consideration, I was being called to bear witness in my own life to the truth to which the Mission bears gentle evangelical witness, to a constellation of apostolic-



ity and service that constitute the twin chambers of this heart. I learned the Mission church was built single-handed by a Catholic carpenter from Pain de Vie. I am privileged to worship in such a place, and to participate in the radical legacy of Pain de Vie—if not exactly in form, then in spirit.

This brief recollection doesn’t capture the fullness of what I’ve discovered at St. John’s, something that I think can hardly be expressed in words: the body and presence of Christ. I don’t feel as though I found Orthodoxy, so much as Orthodoxy (through the burning, golden particularity of St. John’s) found me, which is to say that Christ found me. I can only confess that this has felt providential, in the fullest sense of the term.

This has required conversion and repentance—always ongoing, always something inchoate and incomplete—but it’s revealed to me something, given me a gift of inestimable worth: infinitely vulnerable and strong, infinitely poor and rich. It has given me the fullness of the Church, of the Body of Christ, which is the fullness of the mystery of love. It has shown me Christ in the poor and the rejected, in intense pain and brokenness, in communion and healing and friendship. It has shown me the Lord of Love in every human heart and face, as William Blake might have said.

I don’t know how to be worthy of such a gift. St. John’s is a place where I can begin. Begin again, begin for the first time (in fear and trembling, but also in hope and joy), to learn this.

— Michael (photo above)

**Please consider  
including in your will  
a donation to  
St. John’s Mission —  
‘the shroud has no pockets.’**

Immense suffering is right under our noses. We don't even notice. The naked man is screaming to all of us that we are all out of our minds. Since God started to talk to humanity, that's been the divine role of the fool in any society.

The silent suffering of abortion, the violence of the youth confusion on sexual identity, artificially perpetuated by ideologies, the encouragement to use all kinds of drugs and recreational escapes, the saturation of fake news and collective lie-telling. The rewriting of history to create artificial guilt and distraction from real crimes. Pushing MAiD as an ethical alternative to natural death, seen almost as a moral necessity. The greed that creates homelessness, and new generations without any hope to simply raise a family. The redefinition of marriage, and arbitrary remaking of social norms. The extreme polarization of speech, and people encouraged and stoked in this by our politicians. The racialization of society. The conscious removal of any reference to faith or God in speech and in the public domain.

We're in a metaphysical battle for the very soul of humanity. It's easier to blame, but the naked screaming man reminds us the battle isn't for or against them, whomever they are. The battle's for us, for you, for my soul. At the Mission, he's screaming. Is anyone listening?

—*p.r.*

### Apartments for Refugees

In June, the Mission gained use of two apartments. A five-minute walk, they'll welcome and house recent refugees who otherwise would be in the street or a general shelter.

The general shelter is a human warehouse, an open room with eighty beds, an indiscriminate mix with hard-core homeless and those with severe problems of substance abuse or mental health. Many of the refugees come from close-knit communities, and this change shocks them. At the Mission they regain some of their native dignity as a valued member of a family community, which often also includes worshipping God and serving the poor. Many are eager to help, and serve wholeheartedly and for free. We've learned much already from them about the privilege to serve, and how essential it is for all of us.

On hearing about this new housing opportunity, many of our friends have worked tirelessly to quickly make it a reality. Hauling garbage and old belongings, scraping walls and floors, painting, cleaning. We're already sharing meals and prayers there, in the middle of the unfinished apartments.

#### Needs list – can you help?

- eggs, sugar, pancake mix & syrup, milk (fresh)
- oil (olive & vegetable), hot sauce
- short pasta, pasta sauce
- chickpeas, rice (small bags)
- XL disposable gloves, laundry soap
- travel-size soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo



We've kept long 'work watches' together. We have finished painting and general cleaning, but carpets need to come out, and the electrical and plumbing work awaits.

Many heroes have emerged from the community effort, with many indelible images. I picture Ayana, a volunteer from Ethiopia in his thirties, with little English. It is the end of the day and I find him walking barefoot around the apartment, in oversized painting clothes covered in white paint, beaming with a huge smile. We'd given him the clothes when he arrived at the Mission that morning. He had no idea he'd be painting. "Ayana, we need you to paint today!" "Okay," he said, "where do I go?" I learned Ayana had said earlier that he's happy to work in the apartments because of the "humility" that he observes in the community, and "the way that they respect us." This makes him "want to work hard so that the good will grow."

What is born is not just a housing program but a community where hope is again enkindled in the hearts of people who have lost everything in coming to us. In turn, we are immensely enriched by the depths of their humanity, faith, and courage.

P.S. Can you find in your heart a way to support the remaining renovations? Financial support could help cover the electrical and plumbing work (e.g. installing showers).

—*Brother Luke*

### Can You Help Furnish the Refugee Apartments?

**Bedrooms** – movable wall partitions; curtains, rods (2); frosted glass door; twin bedsheets; pillowcases; mattress covers; single-bed mattresses, box springs, frames; bunkbeds; dressers, wardrobes; movable floor rugs; clothing hampers; desks or writing tables

**Kitchen** – tablecloths, garbage pails, glasses, mugs, cups, cutlery, colander, dishrack, plates, bowls, spice rack

**Living area** – stylish armchairs; lamps, desk; floorboard paint, varnish, wax; patio table, chairs; door mats



## Faces of St. John's

*This page, clockwise from top left:*  
Ayana; Abu; Good Neighbours staff; Elijah, Kamau, Luke, Francis, Ahmedine; Tsegaye; Biruk; Restom; Kidan.

*Front cover, left to right: some of the Mission's renovation crew for the refugee apartments (see article, page 5), Michael, Restom, Tyler, Luke, Mohammad, Biruk, Jacob, Pius.*

