

ST. JOHN'S

Newsletter

Autumn 2025

“The true basis for common action is not the convergence on a theory, but the journeying-together in a deed.... We meet in essence not when our theologies coincide, but when our communities share bread with the hungry, care for the sick, defend the wronged. Unity is forged in the common resistance to the forces that attempt to efface the human face.”

— Ecumenical
Patriarch Bartholomew



MISSION

Fighting with yourself is challenging, but can bring peace

Elena is a complex character. She speaks five or six languages very well, and yet she lives on a disability pension because of mental illness. The money is not much, so she is creative and finds ways to add to her income. She does embroidery and takes on small jobs. At times she writes poetry, out of the generosity of her heart. This does not bring her any money, but it does give hope to a beautiful soul who is learning to live below the poverty line with dignity.

She is an immigrant to Toronto, and she adapts here the best she can. She comes from a country where women's rights are limited, so enjoys the freedom of being herself here. Poverty as such is not a burden to her, and she never complains about it. However, because of her mental illness she must navigate through difficult encounters with people she meets at drop-ins. Sometimes she ends up in trouble, real trouble, and sometimes to the point where the police are called to intervene. With her reflexive sense of humor, she has been trying to figure out how to reduce the frequency of these incidents, which, in time, have started to take a toll on her.

A few times a week she needs to talk, to hear herself, and to understand her thoughts. At one point, the fog lifted. She understood that she had to make changes in the way she interacts with people, and that these changes, to her surprise, must start with her. She took this thought seriously, and began to consider what she could change so that these incidents would decrease.

She started changing what she identified as potential sources of conflict. Her resolutions were simple and practical. However, she realized the most difficult thing for her was to be generous, to give to others from what she has. "It's funny, you know, I have these things, and I tell myself, it's good to donate them, to give them to

others, and that it would give me peace. But then, I realize I can't let it happen. I understand mentally, but I'm resistant when I have to hand them over. I resist peace...it's interesting. I realized that for me it's difficult to donate. To freely give to others... It's challenging to fight with yourself."



We all know that, which is why maybe we stop this fight and we look for scapegoats. But not Elena. She started to bring food to us: rice, beans, sweets, and cereal. One morning we ran out of cereal for people, and her gift made other people happy. (The large quantity of sugar they put in cereal in North America is irresistible.)

Elena might not know, but this is the path to peace: the challenging fight with yourself. We always identify the enemy and the threat outside of us, and we forget about ourselves. About the good fight. If the people and country who go to war would start "fighting" with themselves to be generous with the poor, peace would not be only in our prayers but a reality in the land.

We might think that Elena is just a person who takes her lack of generosity too seriously. But she is a prophetic voice, who shows there is one fight worth fighting to achieve peace: to fight with yourself, to make room for another. It does not really matter who wins and who loses, as long as we become a free gift to the poor.

— Father Nicolaie

Barbara

Barbara, servant of God, our next-door neighbor, and member of the St. John the Compassionate community, has recently fallen asleep in the Lord. With her son, she joined the Orthodox Church a few years ago.

The funeral service was conducted by Father Nicolaie at the Mission's St. Silouan Chapel, with the burial near St. Mary of Egypt Refuge at Madoc, where the Mission has purchased plots of land to bury members of the community. (See *photos*, page 6)

ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE MISSION

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Without murmuring

Those who know the streets speak of shifts. Increasing violence. Diminishing respect for life. Declining pursuit of goodness. Disunity in the small, and in the significant. Deepening segregation, pulling us from truth and from one another. We pay a price we don't understand.

Older homeless members of our community speak of an unfamiliar eagerness to harm the other. "You know, back when we were young, if you had a problem, you'd fight. There was a kind of respect in it. Now, they can just shoot you, just for looking a certain way. I don't know what's wrong with this new generation. It's scary..."

Just two weeks ago, people were shot at an intersection near Good Neighbours in Scarborough. This year, two students from a nearby high school were killed. They were in Grade 8 and Grade 10, and their names were Jamal and Abdul. In the news, and then slipped from memory, part of numbers that grow daily.

What times are we living in, and where are they taking us?

We need to pray for our hearts open to abundant mercy, to become more tolerant, more understanding. To learn to forgive even before we are wronged. To offer hospitality to the stranger. To nurture compassion for those who hurt us, for words that wound like darts. To pray for each other in silence, and instead of retaliation, reconciliation.

Every grain of goodness in the community and in us must be gathered and nurtured, praying for its multiplication. To avoid quarreling, our hearts must dwell within the shelter of the goodness that has been entrusted to us. We know this goodness; when we pursue and do it, it quiets our anxiety.

For a true response to the quarreling that's killing our youth, and segregating and alienating the other, we must receive and do good without murmuring. Keep our hearts grounded in forgiveness, and in the mercy poured out upon us through the cross carried by those who were far too young to bear it.

— Father Nicolaie

Prayer service for the children killed in Israel and Gaza

"Where is God, then," said Ivan Karamazov again, 'when a child is hunted and eaten by dogs?' Well, God is precisely in that little child who suffers and dies!" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, by way of Olivier Clément)

On September 3, members of the community at St. John's Mission read aloud the first name and age of each of the children killed in Israel and Gaza since the start of the conflict on October 7, 2023 (see photo, p. 6). This took over seven-and-a half hours; the names and ages of the sixteen Israeli children killed on October 7 were mentioned alongside the names and ages of the 12,211 Palestinian children killed following the invasion of Gaza. This list was provided to us by Matteo Zuppi, the Cardinal-Priest of Sant'Egidio, and our service was inspired by his own prayer vigil on the eve of the Feast of the Assumption on August 14.

Many from the community gathered to read the names. Some wept, some silently recited the Jesus Prayer. It was a glimpse into the magnitude of the suffering that Christ bears, into the heart of Mary pierced by many swords (Luke 2:35) – into a sea of suffering and pain, an ocean of darkness and death.

In saying each child's name, we placed this child before God, but also attempted, in however little and simple a way, to share in the suffering of God, to "comfort the

comforter," and in so doing to participate in the work of God's healing, repairing mercy. It felt as though we were bringing before Christ a mountain of bodies and that it was so small an act of 'kindness' as to be nearly senseless. Amid this impossible suffering, we attempted more than just remembering, but truly praying for the dead, and entering into solidarity with the crushed innocents of this world.

We acted out of the fervent and foolish hope that one day all weapons will be transfigured into plowshares, and all the tears of these holy innocents will be wiped away. *Kyrie eleison.*

— Michael

Our 'needs list' – can you help?

- sugar, jam, pancake mix, syrup
- oil, herbs, spices
- pasta, rice, lentils, dry chickpeas
- XL disposable gloves, aprons, men's socks
- bleach, shampoo, soap (dish, bars, liquid)

You Can Help



Visit St. John's Bakery

- "Award-winning non-profit social enterprise producing Toronto's best organic sour-dough breads and sweets"
- Check out our baked goods, as seen on 
- Visit 153 Broadview; shop; leave happy

stjohnsbakery.com

Volunteer

- Volunteers are the heart of what we do at St. John's
- Volunteer by yourself, or as a group
- Visit, phone or e-mail us to find out more, or tap the **Volunteer** button at the top of our web site

Donate goods

- Check the 'Needs list' box on page 5, and the longer list on our web site

Donate by cheque, or cash

- Tax receipts are issued, as we are a Canadian registered charity

Donate on-line

- Make a no-fee donation using PayPal, single or recurring; pay by credit card, or your PayPal account
- Tap **Donate now** at the top of our web site
- CanadaHelps can also be used, but with a fee

Donate securities

- Plan donations in your will or life insurance policy
- Donate RRSP, RRIF, TFSA, stocks, real estate
- Donate through endowments, donor-advised funds, private foundations

Donate through your employer

- Your employer may offer (matching) donations through payroll deductions, as well as group volunteering



ST. JOHN'S eco market

Visit us at 740 Queen Street East, Toronto

See the 'You can help too' menu on stjohnsmission.org

Luis: my experience at St. John the Compassionate Mission

For most of my life, I struggled to find a sense of belonging, I tried to fill that hole in many ways – switching schools, jobs, countries. But that missing piece was still missing. I started volunteering at Good Neighbors in Scarborough, discovering how rewarding it can be to serve others just for the sake of doing good. I met people with different backgrounds and experiences, who found their own way of helping others. The pride and gratification I found working with them began for the first time to fill the gap in my heart. A few months later I visited St. Mary's Refuge, with a group of amazing people. I realized that what I've yearned for all this time was community. Learning the history of the Refuge, being able to enjoy the beautiful location and all the work others have done before me, and adding my own work so others can enjoy it after – this was life-changing. And now St. John's has helped me see what's so special about this community: the decades of commitment to serve and help others, with God at the center. With their example. I couldn't be more thankful to everyone for letting me be part of it.



Peace, like a river

Our world seems increasingly plagued by violence, both near and far, obvious and brutal, opaque and diffuse. The violence of war, rendered against bodies as much as against souls, as well as the violence of degradation and isolation, of humiliation and exclusion. Violence inflicted upon the earth and the vulnerable, the elderly and the very young. The world is burning with violence, with violence and counter-violence.

From July 20–23, young men gathered at St. Mary of Egypt Refuge to participate in a “peace boot camp.” A joint initiative of St. John's Mission and the Refuge, this was a gathering devoted to training in and reflection on the life of Christian discipleship, especially as articulated in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. In a world increasingly marked by violence, the purpose of the camp was to incarnate a vision of community, goodness, and kindness, not just as abstract ideals but as living realities, as concrete ascetical practices.

On the shore of the Black River, the young men camped, prayed, labored and swam beneath an unseasonably clement July sun. Each morning, they gathered at 5 a.m. for prayer, and then proceeded to work on the land – clearing brush, planting trees, and building a cross. They ate simple meals together and reflected on the writings of Pope Francis and the Church Fathers. These days were punctuated by virtual talks delivered by international peacemakers, including an Israeli peace activist and a Mennonite pastor.

Mary Marrocco, the founder of the Refuge, joined the participants to reflect on the origins of the Refuge in the prophetic vision of a “place that is good,” a place, outside the city of Toronto, that would create a haven from the violence of the world, especially the violence

done to women and the unborn. In creating this haven, the Refuge acts as both an affirmation of life – that your soul matters – and a space of resistance to violence. The good soil of the Refuge was the nourishing ferment in which the men labored and prayed.

At the end of the camp, many of the young men noted that they had discovered a sense of community, friendship, and discipline: they found a space in which they could be more empathetic, open, and reflective – where they could listen to the “still small voice” of God. In shared labor and ‘suffering,’ they learned about how peacemaking is not just an attitude but a struggle – a struggle for innocence, gentleness, and littleness. The red cross they planted on the opposite shore of their camp was a small sign that violence does not need to have the last word: in our life together, our life anchored in Christ, peace can flourish like wildflowers.

— Michael





FACES OF ST. JOHN'S

Front page — Stephen, perennial Mission presence, until Johan funded a ticket to Montreal. C'est l'amour!

Clockwise from top left — Sr. Vassiliki, Br. Luke & Sr. Penka at Good Neighbours; Restom and Tesfu, effecting repairs; Camillo, comfortable on the Mission steps; the massacre of the innocents, art for the prayer vigil (p. 3); Barbara's chrismation; her interment near St. Mary's Refuge (p. 2); Elizabeth's birthday; volunteer Minoosh at St. John's eco market.

