



ST. JOHN THE COMPASSIONATE NEWSLETTER

Summer 2010

Love without Judgment

In September of 2009, after checking out St. John the Compassionate Mission earlier in the spring, and after receiving a blessing from her bishop, our daughter Naomi flew to Toronto to begin a year's worth of work there. Being prairie folk and never having visited Toronto before, my wife and I dropped into Toronto for a few hours on our way out to the Maritimes last summer to see what our daughter was getting herself into. We met Fr. Roberto and Sub. Dn. Pawel, had a tour of the mission and environs, and were cautiously satisfied that this could qualify as an OK place for Naomi to spend a year. After Presbytera Linda visited our daughter in November, I decided to spend some time there myself, so I flew to Toronto early in the morning of Bright Monday.

I not only wanted to spend some time with our daughter, but I also wanted to poke around and take in the atmosphere, meet some of the people who came to the mission, see how it was run and just get a feel for the ethos of the mission. I'd been thinking for some years already that we needed to do some kind of mission outreach in Saskatoon, and I felt that this could be a good experience to help me understand what this type of mission is all about.

I had some preconceived ideas of what a mission should be like, but I wanted to know what constituted an Orthodox street mission as opposed to, let's say, a Salvation Army street mission. I had recently dropped into a mission in Saskatoon with a couple of parishioners but came away quite confused and disappointed with what I saw.

After spending a few days walking along endless Toronto streets with Naomi, visiting a niece, and seeing an old friend, I spent several days hanging out at the mission, visiting with the people who came there, and generally

seeing what could be seen. As well, I spent four nights at Lourmel house, home of the Lived Theology School as well as visiting with Fr. Roberto and Sub-Dn. Pawel.

During my time at the mission I noticed a Muslim woman answering Fr. Roberto's personal office telephone, and then I got speaking with a Caribbean man who was mopping the floors after lunch who said he was from a Roman Catholic background. At lunch I sat



across from Heather and her husband who were from some Protestant evangelical background. And then there was Elizabeth, a delightful Hungarian woman with whom I exchanged a few Hungarian greetings as well as some wonderful conversation. None of this variety seemed to matter to anyone. There were those there who, it appeared, didn't even really need the services of the mission.

There was someone there from almost every conceivable background, and they were all part of the fabric of St. John the Compassionate Mission.

In my purist type mentality, I was expecting the Orthodox to be serving the poor, but I saw hardly any of that. Instead, I saw that there was a community of human beings, from every conceivable religious and nonreligious background, needy ones and some not so needy, working together in a communion of love, manifesting that which they probably wouldn't have identified as love, but truly was.

And what I saw from those who administer St. John was love without judgment and love expecting nothing in return. These were not some holy persons serving some unholy persons. There didn't appear to be any 'top down' mentality here; rather, it was everyone serving/loving everyone else without judgment. Everyone was welcome
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First Impressions or Lasting?

It's the first impression which will either open the door or close it. After two days at the Mission, Lived Theology School and Lourmel all I have is a first impression, but the door at St. John the Compassionate Mission is certainly open and so is mine! I came to Toronto from Saskatchewan to visit my sister, Naomi (one of the LTS interns) and to get a taste of what St. John's is all about.

My time at the Mission has been both less than I expected and more than I expected. There is certainly less work to do than I expected. People may imagine that serving the poor in such a place as St. John the Compassionate Mission would be comprised of arduous slaving in the kitchen, cooking, washing dishes and cleaning. To the contrary, often the kitchen has been so full of willing hands that the meal was cleaned up before I knew it and I have missed my opportunity to help. I learned quickly that I needed to be a little faster if I wanted to help with clean up. Certainly, many hands make light work (thanks to so many committed volunteers!) and this leaves a little more time for visiting and getting to know each other! There is definitely more of that than I expected! In fact, as a visitor, I have been encouraged by several people to simply get to know the people at the mission instead of constantly searching for things to do. So most of my time has been spent meeting and visiting with people; volunteers, community members, interns, friends and neighbours. Soon after I arrived, the people I had just met were orienting me to the daily routine of the mission. Breakfast, tea time, lunch, tea time again and supper have been important times for meeting and connecting with others. It didn't take long for me to get the message: the time you spend getting to know us is just as valuable as the work you do.

I am happy to be here! Thank you to everyone for the warm welcome!

Heidi Funk, visiting from Saskatoon



Life as a Floor Supervisor, is there one?

Since March 4, 2010 I've enjoyed the opportunity to serve here at St John the Compassionate Mission as the Floor Supervisor.

Meeting new people everyday and helping Mission volunteers, along with our Mission brothers and sisters and find solutions for a myriad of problems ensures I am always challenged.

Interviewing individuals for a position to volunteer at St John's or with the Bakery or even the Thrift Store; to ensure that the Mission will be cleaned, our brothers and sisters will be served nutritious, tasty meals and the premises will be properly maintained. Without our volunteers' commitment to hard work we could not serve so many in our community. It also allows many to experience the magic of St John's.

Many volunteers and students on placement have marvelled aloud of how the people they have met and served and the act of giving of themselves has proved educational and humbling. Working alongside people from a variety of countries, ages and experiences has been rewarding as we serve the hungry and beautify St John's property!

My next project is to implement a community outreach program alongside Maya Eseaspersaud, our Everest College placement student, to educate neighbouring families and businesses about St John's Mission services. Then to run a fundraiser to earn money to purchase T-shirts for St John's Volunteers! I look forward to engaging and empowering others through my position here at St John's Mission.



Nicole Stillman

St John's Academy Speaks Out

Mojgan is one of the students at St John's Academy. She has been with SJA since 2008. When she started with the program, she was underachieving at school, struggling in both Math and English. She also struggled with completing school work, often giving up when she found her schoolwork challenging. She is currently in grade 10 at Riverdale and on the Honour Roll! This is her story:

How Saint John's Academy has affected me?

I started coming to Saint John's when I was in grade eight. It was the last few months of school. I had always found it difficult, all my life. I didn't like going to school because I found the work that they gave us hard. But when I started coming to Saint John's all that changes, I actually started liking school because finally for the first time in my life, I understood the work. When I started grade nine, I was getting a 72 average by the last report card I got a 79 average. By one year my average went up by seven percent. And even now that I'm in grade ten, I still get all the work because of Saint John's Academy this year. I actually made the honour roll with an 83.5 average. Not only has this place helped me academically, but it's also helped me with my everyday life. This place has helped me to understand that being on time is important because if you're not then that shows that you really don't respect that place, so you don't care if you're early or late. My tutors and the grammar that I learned helped me to communicate better.

Mojgan Hamil



Mother Sophia stirring the pot

So what did you do today?

There is no question as blood-curdling as this. The sense of failure comes rushing in, as I realize, I have done nothing today!

Things can be testing, if there aren't five crises going on then there must be something wrong. Not so much life or death, but issues, or persons, that require one's immediate attention. Many people will write to-do lists only to have them swallowed up. I can recall numerous times, where I have gone to do a simple task, only to be distracted by 4 people and 5 things that are "urgent".

One of the foundational ideas of this place is that success, and consequently one's worth, is not based on what you do. I would like to think I am not a failure, though learning to accept failure is key to being here. Somewhere in this jumbled mess of life, we manage to do 1% of what we were supposed to do and if the Holy Spirit is there, maybe the one thing we needed to do. The miracle is that despite peoples' glaring brokenness, despite pure chaos. St John's somehow manages to stay on track.

Michael Luciuk

Small Local Church with a Big Heart

A small little church located at 155 Broadview Ave. right in the heart of Riverdale. Maybe small yet touches the hearts of many people surrounding this community. Its doors are open to the public every Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday for a healthy delicious lunch and every Wednesday a fabulous dinner is also put together for women and children prepared by a hard working delightful man who they call "Ed, the cook". 10 years ago Ed was only a volunteer at the church due to his unfortunate sudden loss of employment. Like so many others trying to provide for their families Ed had to go on Social Assistance. While on it he was looking for any type of employment. Through the grace of our Father it so

happened; St John's was seeking a full-time chef. Ed is now currently the head chef, and says, "It's a positive thing in all aspects, my life is better now and I love it here, I am happy to be part of this Mission."

There are also many volunteers who came in to volunteer their time and hard work. Helping prepare the meals and cleaning duties. A lady named Pat who has been a volunteer for 8 years with the Mission recently turned 65, a senior citizen retired; collecting pension enjoys coming here, although she does not have to. She considers this place her family and also enjoys being here with the many people, who also love this "home type feeling".

Another volunteer named

Sandorne, a new comer to Canada has been volunteering her time with the Mission for over 2 months, although unable to speak fluent English with a great big beautiful smile say, "I like it here, every day Happy!"

This Compassionate Mission to many is a huge support system for those who have lost their family, friends and passion for life. St John's gives the people, primarily the homeless a place to call home, friends to call family and the proper nutrition they need to keep on surviving the cold nights and more realistic, the cold realities that life sometimes brings.

Maya Eseaspersaud
(intern from local college)



Ed



Pat



Sandorne

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whether they really needed the services of St. John or not. No one was judged.

When I was a young Pentecostal pastor in the mid-seventies, Fred Valuck was one of my parishioners. Fred had an incredible ministry in the two native reserves close to our church. Fred lived like the people in the reserves; He farmed like they did; he dressed like they did; he drove the types of vehicles and farm equipment that they drove; He went to their weddings, wakes and funerals, prayed with them and ate their food. In short

he was one of them, and they loved him deeply and when Fred died, they all came to his funeral and grieved his passing.

At St. John the Compassionate Mission, I see something similar to this. There is no 'top down' 'we can help you' mentality, only 'Love without Judgment'. That's the phrase that keeps returning to my mind whenever I think about my time at the Mission.

-Fr. Bernard Funk, Saskatoon

St. John the Compassionate Mission

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