

# STONEGATE MINISTRY



# Newsletter

“Working together to build a stronger, kinder and more just community”

**Editor's Note:** We are grateful to Horace Knight who has led the ministry as Board Chair for the past four years. Under his leadership, our outreach at Great Finds has flourished and our community programs have continued to develop. Horace will continue to serve as Vice Chair. We are pleased to welcome Peter Patterson as the new chair. Peter is a member of Christ Church St. James Anglican, and has served in a volunteer capacity with several Christian charities and on the Stonegate Ministry board for many years.

## AN UPDATE FROM OUR NEW CHAIR



The Stonegate Board of Directors has always been very engaged in all of its programs. Never has this been more obvious than during the worst pandemic in generations. As the response to the pandemic has threatened to close down our programs to those most marginalized, members have jumped in with both feet to try to keep alive our services to those in need.

Although half of our revenue disappeared with the mandated closing of our thrift store, Great Finds, we made an immediate decision to maintain our staff – both for their own sakes, and because we clearly could not maintain our services without their skills and leadership. Fortunately, we were able to take advantage of the generous government Wage Subsidy program.

This allowed us to continue the operation of the **CCSJ Food Pantry**, supplying food and supplies to families most in need. Continuing the food bank meant arranging for supplies from Daily Bread, obtaining PPE equipment to keep staff and clients safe, purchasing cleansing and disinfecting supplies, and delivering the food to needy families waiting outside the building. We were helped by our generous donors to meet special needs including providing materials and activities for young people and children who would otherwise be stranded in ill-equipped homes with little to do.

We were also able to continue programs online through Zoom which countered isolation and loneliness, allowing people, many elderly, to continue to meet *virtually*, rather than in person. They were offered companionship, support, and hope for the future through these regular community gatherings. We are grateful for our faithful **‘Prayer for You’ team** that has continued to pray for both the governance issues of the Ministry and the needful communities that we serve.

This month, we have also been able to partially re-open **Great Finds**, after negotiating a reduced rent while closed. Grateful clients can once again buy the clothing and supplies they desperately need at prices that they can afford. In addition, our benevolence clients, who have extremely limited resources, are given the opportunity to shop for free to meet the basic needs of their families. But we still face **many critical issues with little clarity** on future Covid related restrictions: *(continued on page 2)*

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## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Stonegate Ministry is an alliance of local Christian churches working in partnership with the community through shared resources, offering programs and opportunities to build healthy relationships, strong families, a sense of belonging and a deeper relationship with God. We endeavour to address the needs of the whole person and families to bridge toward a better life and to be a faithful voice to ensure everyone in the community is treated with justice and Christian compassion.

(continued from page 1)) • Our landlord has other plans for our current store site. Will we be able to find a new location for Great Finds that will serve our community hopefully even better than our present site?

- Can we allow our faithful senior store volunteers who badly want to rejoin us, the opportunity to do so in complete safety?
- When will we be able to safely restore **full operation** of Great Finds?
- And how and when will we be able to re-engage our other programs that ease the pervasive loneliness and demonstrate God's love through personal and practical help?



From you, our faithful supporters, we **ask for prayer** for wisdom in these Board decisions, for guidance for our staff and volunteers, and for creativity to fulfill our plans to provide continuing support through our programs for those most in need!

Many thanks for your prayers and ongoing support, and may God bless us all in these uncertain times.

*Peter Patterson, Chair Stonegate Ministry Board*

## GREAT FINDS HAS REOPENED!



While our doors were closed, we were planning and adapting to the many challenges and uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic, but as of July 6, **we are now open!**

Our priority was and is to ensure the health and well-being of our customers, volunteers, staff and the community we serve. We want to provide everyone with a **safe shopping experience**. The majority of our volunteers are seniors and to minimize risk, we have reluctantly decided that they will not be able to volunteer, at least not for the near future.

We deep cleaned our store prior to re-opening. We will also increase the frequency of cleaning all of our surfaces. In addition, we will have a sanitizer station for your safety and convenience.

The next time you visit, here is what you can expect:

- In order to allow additional time to thoroughly clean and stock our sales floors, Great Finds business hours have been reduced to opening only on **Mondays and Tuesdays from 11:00am to 4:00pm**.
- We are creating a safer shopping space by removing some merchandise displays and creating additional space on our sales floors to further support social distancing. Decals will be placed on the floor to better help judge the proper physical distance from other shoppers upon check-out. We will also limit the number of shoppers inside at any given time and will limit the amount of time spent in the store whenever required.
- Our staff and volunteers will be wearing protective gear and will have a plexiglass shield on the sales counter for their protection as well as yours. All customers will be **required to wear a mask** upon entry into the store. If you do not have a mask, Great Finds will supply one for you on your first visit. If you are not feeling well, we kindly ask that you stay home and take care of yourself.
- Our fitting room and washroom will be closed to further protect your health and safety.
- Until further notice, we will **not be accepting any donation drop-offs** due to a very full inventory.

We want to thank you for supporting us as we work hard within our community to make Great Finds a safe place to shop for your everyday clothing and household needs. We will continue to listen to the advice given from our government and health authorities as well as feedback from our volunteers, staff and customers. Our priority is the health and well-being of all as we consider how best we can serve you while helping to limit the spread of Covid-19.

*Jeannie Martinez, Great Finds Manager*

## FOOD PANTRY CONTINUES DURING PANDEMIC

As the months of uncertainty and stress of the Covid-19 pandemic continues, we see increasing need for families to use whatever resources they can find to help them acquire financial, emotional and food security. **Stonegate Ministry helps provide that support with their on-going partnership with the Christ Church St. James Food Pantry.**

CCSJ Food Pantry serves the Lakeshore and Stonegate communities. Lately, we have seen new families come from other parts of the city where their community food bank closed. **More than 40 percent of food banks in the city have closed** during the pandemic. This puts a lot of pressure on existing food banks to have adequate levels of food and supplies.

We have been fortunate to have supportive donors who provide food and financial donations as well as PPE supplies from various volunteers, community and church members wanting to get involved to help in any way they can. Church partners like Royal York United Church who donate their time to help with home deliveries and Kingsway Lambton United Church who donate handmade masks for volunteers are just a couple of examples of the support that has been given to CCSJ Food Pantry to help those less fortunate.

**We are all in this together.** Providing food and supplies can help lessen financial burdens and emotional distress. As the fight to find a cure to Covid-19 continues, so does our work to provide some comfort and relief to those who are in need.

*Jeannie Martinez Co-Manager , CCSJ Food Pantry*

## “GOD, COFFEE AND... WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”



The new reality seemed to catch us by surprise in mid-March. A few of us thought *“while the crisis will impact church services, etc., certainly we’ll still be able to gather around a coffee table together, won’t we?”* And of course, we soon realized that this was not simply a wave but a tsunami.

Still, without really missing a beat, the weekly *“God, Coffee and me”* gatherings continued every Tuesday at 3pm, only on ‘Zoom’. And to our happy surprise, the size of those **gatherings actually increased** during the storm of Covid-19. Why was that? Our weekly *“God, Coffee...and me”* group seems to be part of a much larger trend:

The wording on the poster in the window at Great Finds explains the purpose of the weekly study group in these words:

*‘chatting about Jesus...about who He is, what He’s done & what life might look like if we got acquainted’.*

**‘Becoming acquainted with Jesus’** in times of crisis brings an unshakeable faith in fragile times. There is strength in knowing Jesus; courage, confidence and a perspective that lifts us above the moment. There is also an increased love and concern for others that flows from such a relationship. There is hope and a willingness to roll up our sleeves to demonstrate that hope for our friends and neighbours.

**Question:** Where do we go from here? Why must we continue to get a good grip on the Word of God and allow that Word to get a good grip on us?

**Response:** We certainly do not want to return to how life was before this pandemic, for life wasn’t fair. There was an acceptance of inequalities, of increased pollution levels in sea and sky, of a myriad of injustice issues. And to some extent, there was a spiritual apathy that limited our concern for the spiritual health of our communities. Our passion to *‘know Christ and make Him known’* was often more of a flicker than a fire.

*“I’ve never known a time in my life when people are more open to God’s word than they are now,”* said Holy Trinity Brompton’s vicar, Nicky Gumbel, in an online Easter conference. *“There are no other distractions. There’s no football, there’s no sport. There’s no entertainment. People have time to hear the Gospel.”* Indeed, never in modern *(continued on page 4)*

(continued from page 3) history have so many people been sanctioned to their homes, in what the Dean of Gloucester Cathedral, Stephen Lake, calls “an enforced period of reflection.”

The prophet Micah writes: ***O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.***

It is imperative that we continue as ‘students’ around the coffee table. We need to understand the gospel personally in order to live it publicly. We must emerge from this pandemic as a community that ‘*does what is right, loves mercy and walks humbly with our God*’. We welcome any and all to join us for “God, Coffee....and me” when the program resumes afresh in September. There is a chair with your name on it....and a cup of coffee to boot!

Bruce Smith, on assignment to Stonegate Ministry

## OUR PROGRAMS DURING COVID-19



I don't think any of us could have imagined what the past three months would have looked like - back in April. We have been through many ups and downs, and though much has changed, the resilience and **kindness of our community** has become ever more apparent. I have witnessed some beautiful moments during this difficult time. One of our volunteers decided to write letters to her friends and sell tote bags to raise money for the Food Pantry. Others have taken the initiative to make weekly phone calls and offered to pick up groceries for local seniors.

Our programs have officially finished for the year, and although many of our original plans for the summer have been cancelled, Stonegate Ministry, like many other organizations in South Etobicoke, is learning how to move forward by adapting. More than ever before, our community needs connection, friendship, and a sense of togetherness.

Over the past three months, our programs moved **online to Zoom**. We partnered with Stonegate Health Centre in a community art campaign titled, “Caring, Connected, Communities,” and we distributed children’s activity packages at the Food Pantry. We are also in the process of collaborating on a community initiative to **create and distribute face masks** for the most vulnerable members of our community. We are currently seeking community members to participate in this initiative. If you are interested in cutting cloth, sewing masks, or biking around the community to transport materials, please contact me at [Samantha@stonegateministry.ca](mailto:Samantha@stonegateministry.ca) for more information.

We believe that by collaborating with community partners and sharing resources, we can have a greater impact on the community. As we prepare for the Fall, we know our ministry programs will look different this year, and we need your support and prayer as we discover how best to move forward. Still, we have no doubt that **as we love our neighbours as ourselves**, whether in person, on Zoom, or over the phone, our community will be stronger because of it.

Samantha Coelho, Director of Programs

## CONTACT US

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