

STONEGATE MINISTRY



Newsletter

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



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Never has it been more reassuring to know that God is in charge than right now!

In the midst of a seemingly worsening pandemic, we find ourselves challenged on many fronts as we strive to assist clients who need our help more than ever. Many of our clients live alone, usually in quite cramped quarters – single mothers, unemployed individuals, isolated seniors – and most lack access to food, appropriate clothing, and someone to talk to.

Our staff and volunteers have stepped up to help in any way they can – sometimes in person, such as at the food bank, and sometimes online, as programs for the isolated are provided virtually by Zoom, rather than around a table with a meal as before the pandemic.

The Food Pantry, facing unprecedented demand, has recast itself many times over the past months, from serving inside (downstairs in the church), to upstairs in the foyer, to outside on the patio, and now again inside downstairs to allow our clients access to additional choice of fresh fruit and vegetables. All this with most of our usual 70 volunteers unable to help because of their own vulnerability – leaving us with some wonderful young people filling the gap, but many of these now returning to school.

Our thrift store, Great Finds, that provides quality clothing at incredibly low prices because of our donors, re-opened in the summer, despite the loss again of wonderful volunteers for the same risk reasons. We offered our wares at large discounts to make up for the time we were under the lockdown – only now to be closed again as our store lease has expired!

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We have long wanted larger premises in order to serve our customer base more beneficially, and we had a line on nearby premises that would have been an excellent, convenient site for just such services – only to have a fire in an adjoining restaurant unit, caused by inattention, frustrate our plans!

Through all of this, we have been able to pay and retain our staff – partly through the Wage Subsidy and partly through the generosity of our donors – and thus have continued to meet the needs of many in our neighbourhood.

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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)) • Now, facing moving and storage costs, without any income at all from the store until we again find new quarters, we are in a tight spot and would ask you to consider your financial support. A gift in any amount will help us get through this difficult time. We would also ask for your prayers for our clients who have come to rely not only on the quality goods offered at very affordable prices, but the camaraderie with staff and volunteers. Their loneliness is accentuated by the necessary social distancing. Also remember our staff and all our dedicated volunteers.



Thankfully God has always blessed the Ministry by surrounding it with people who care for their neighbours, and this has never been more apparent than during this pandemic.

Thanks to you all!

Peter Patterson, Chair Stonegate Ministry Board

GREAT FINDS REOPENED AND THE FOOD BANK



Covid-19 has affected our lives tremendously. The stress and worry of this virus have impacted our daily lives in a way that has changed our very way of life. As the Store Manager for Great Finds Thrift Store for the last 6 years, I have seen the significant impact the store has made on the community. I have come to know many of the customers, and for many, it is not only a place to shop for great deals, but also where you can **make and meet new friends**. Great Finds has truly become a community store, however, like many stores, we too had to close during the pandemic.

While Great Finds was closed, my work as Co-Director at the Christ Church St. James **Food Pantry became even more crucial**. Covid-19 affected many jobs, putting pressure on food banks to accommodate the increase in food bank clients. We have extended the Food Pantry's hours to accommodate this demand. We have also been able to resume having clients enter the church to do their grocery shopping.

Great Finds finally re-opened on July 6 - but for only two days – Mondays and Tuesdays, as our senior volunteers were restricted from serving due to their higher risk. To help those who were feeling the financial pressure of Covid-19, we put the entire store on sale at 50% off our already low prices. We also resumed our Benevolence program, providing a value of **over \$2,000 of goods at no cost** to families in need. Our prices were already affordable but at this time, every little bit helps and we are doing our part in helping support our community in its time of need.



Sadly, Great Finds' time at our current location has come to an end. Our lease has not been renewed and as a result, shortly after re-opening, we find ourselves having to close again until a new location is secured. Tuesday September 29 was our last day at 2358 Lake Shore Blvd. W. However, we will be moving to a new location and **continue to serve**



the Mimico/Lake Shore community as soon as an appropriate facility can be found. One of our goals is to have more retail space in order to provide our clients with an even broader selection.

We would like to thank you for your support and patronage and we look forward to seeing and serving you again soon at our new location.

Jeannie Martinez, Great Finds Manager & Food Pantry Co-Manager

GOD, COFFEE & . . . ME - "Put the coffee on"

Following a 2-month summer pause, this weekly coffee shop gathering has resumed, via Zoom. We were really pleased to see many of our friends return in September, as we also welcomed a few new folks around the virtual table.

For those who may not be familiar, "God, Coffee and me" began as a 6 week 'experiment' 5 years ago. The **format was very simple**: a table in a coffee shop, a hope that folks might join us, a handful of New Testaments, and coffee.

Our first little meeting saw 2 people bravely pull up a chair. One never returned, while the other became 'the evangelist' and brought friends who have stayed with us ever since. At times the group could be as small as six, but **the average gathering is in the double digits**. Over these years of informally gathering around that table each Tuesday, we have walked through the Gospels of Mark and John, the book of Acts and Philippians. We are presently wading into the book of Revelation.

And why? Ultimately it is all about relationships and friendships, with the hope of introducing and getting **to know the greatest Friend** in the process.

A favourite story from early on:

One lady had been attending "God, Coffee and me" faithfully. She was (and is) the kind of person our world needs more of - kind, thoughtful, humble, generous, and so much more. But like many people, she had been hurt by a church years earlier.

On one occasion she voiced "*I really love coming to this little group, but I could never go to church*". It was a delight to surprise her with these words: "*I've got bad news for you. You are at church right now. There are a bunch of us here; we have prayed, Bibles are on the table, and to top it off, there's coffee! What could be more 'church' than that?*"

As light as that comment was, it is actually true. For her, **it would prove liberating and healing**. Within a few months, that same lady, along with her husband, took the risky step of attending a nearby church service on a Sunday morning. They haven't missed a beat. Additionally, they serve with their sleeves rolled up at the Stonegate Ministry/CCSJ foodbank.



We would be delighted if you 'pulled up a chair' some Tuesday to join us for these weekly gatherings. There is lots of room around the table. The only catch during this pandemic: you'll need to boil your own kettle and BYOB (bring your own Bible). 😊

Bruce Smith, on assignment to Stonegate Ministry

November 7th - HOLD THIS DATE!!

YES, WE ARE HAVING OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISER, BUT THIS YEAR IT WILL BE A VIRTUAL GATHERING COMPLETE WITH A VIRTUAL DINNER. CIRCLE THE EVENING OF SATURDAY NOVEMBER 7 ON YOUR CALENDARS. DETAILS TO FOLLOW.

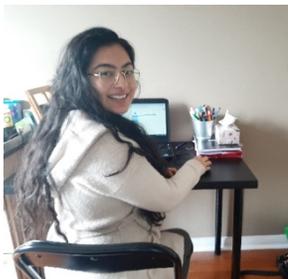
PROGRAMMING DURING A PANDEMIC

As we enter the Fall and begin a new year of programs, we anticipate that this year will continue to look much different than we had first imagined. Both of our women's groups will continue to run, with our Circle of Friends group remaining on Zoom while our Ladies Circle group on Wednesdays will meet outdoors by the Lake! While our ESL and Homework Club will be on hold, we are moving the focus of our in-person outreach to the Food Bank, where we will be starting up a new program called "Get Reading!" distributing donated books to children and youth to encourage a love for reading.

The pandemic has shifted the nature of my role during this time, spending more of my time supporting the foodbank, and helping Jeannie at Great Finds. While chatting with volunteers and clients, I noticed one of our caring volunteers walk over to talk to a woman who looked very distressed and who then broke down in tears. The volunteer motioned for me to come over and explained to me that this woman, a single mom and long-time client of Great Finds, had lost her best friend, and was struggling to manage her son's sickness, all while dealing with the pandemic restrictions. I had the opportunity to reassure her, that she could come talk to us anytime, and that we would be here to support her. That day, I was struck by how important it was that Great Finds was open that day, that there was a **team of faithful, caring volunteers** and that God had orchestrated an opportunity for this woman to receive some social and emotional support.



On another occasion, a participant from one of our ESL classes shared that she was providing care for her very sick husband and hadn't left her home in weeks due to the virus. When I stopped by her backyard the next afternoon, she was so grateful and spoke of how lonely she was, not being able to see other people, and how she missed being able to attend our programs. It reminded me that these kinds of experiences are not unique during this time. Our communities have greater needs now than ever, and our ministry is relying on the support and prayer of our friends and churches. We pray that whatever happens this Fall, we will continue to rely on the grace and wisdom of our God, who even during COVID-19 with our reduced programs and less in-person contact, will continue to **demonstrate His love and goodness** to this community.



Samantha Coelho, Director Ministry Programs

CONTACT US

Your Donation is important to maintain our outreach during this difficult time. You can contribute either:

By cheque mailed to **Stonegate Ministry, 2358 Lake Shore Blvd. W. Toronto, M8V1B6**

OR

By going to **our website** below and clicking on the "Donate Now" button.

All donations are promptly acknowledged and a receipt will be sent at year end. Thank you for your prayers and ongoing financial support, and may God bless you and keep you safe during this trying time.

Contact us at 416-255-6282 or office@stonegateministry.ca

Stonegate Ministry is a registered non-profit charity.

Donations may be made by cheque or online at www.stonegateministry.ca

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