

STONEGATE MINISTRY



Newsletter

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

A WORD FROM THE BOARD

As we transition from one year to the next, it also feels like we are transitioning from the Omicron wave to something more hopeful – perhaps not the normalcy we were used to, but something closer to it. We’ve all been affected by Covid, but probably our clients have been least able to cope with it – and consequently have been most impacted physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Our programs designed specifically for the most vulnerable, such as *Circle of Friends*, and *God, Coffee and Me* have continued online through the pandemic, but even this cannot ease the loneliness and isolation to the same degree as when they were engaging in person – so it is very hopeful to look forward and imagine that we will again be meeting in person in the next month or so!

To be able to resume and even expand such programs is entirely due to the remarkable support and encouragement that the Ministry has received from our member churches and our community of donors and volunteers. At each of the past two year-ends, both occurring deeply into the pandemic, we have emerged intact financially, and this year-end even stronger in capability, with the addition of Natalie Sharpe, our recently added Director of Ministry Programs.

In both years, 2020 and 2021, against all odds, the Ministry has broken even – with our 6 member churches finding ways to increase their support despite their own challenges. We are also so grateful for the way our community of donors has risen to the occasion so willingly. Despite the limitations caused by the need for safety, many of our volunteers have found ways to help, and many others are standing by, ready to step back in once the circumstances change for the better.

We recognize that this year may prove the most difficult yet, as most of the added uncertainties that our clients have faced will not disappear as the pandemic eases:

- The increase in the numbers using our Food bank will remain high, and the changes that Jeannie needed to introduce which doubled and even tripled the length of each Food bank day, will persist.



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- Government financial support programs, which helped bridge some revenue gaps, have been discontinued for 2022.

- Our search for a feasible site for our Great Finds store continues amid increasing rents and an influx of pot stores snatching up otherwise possible locations. Our clients constantly are asking when the much-needed affordable clothing will become available again, and when the benevolence program will recommence. *(continued on page 2)*

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) We are grateful not only for your financial support but also your prayers for the ministry. As a board we feel that God wants us to continue serving the Lake Shore community but so far, our search has not been successful. We would ask that you remember in your prayers especially our ongoing search for a Great Finds location and our staff as they reopen our programs.

Peter Patterson, Chair Stonegate Ministry Board

CHRISTMAS AT CCSJ FOOD PANTRY

December is a very busy month at Christ Church St. James Food Pantry. We see more of our food bank clients during this month than any other month. We have been fortunate this year that the Covid-19 pandemic did not affect our traditional Christmas events held at the food bank.

On Saturday December 11, CCSJ Food Pantry held our Annual **Toy Mountain**. Food Bank clients with children ages 14 years and younger were able to choose a new toy, game, puzzle or activity set for their children. The *response for toy donations* was phenomenal this year! There were many people

looking to make an impact with their outreach. Not only did we receive many donations from the community, and members and friends of our partner churches and organizations, we also received a tremendous amount of donations from *Alderwood United Church* who distributed 5,000 flyers to their surrounding neighbourhood on our behalf! The result was that we received so many toys, games, puzzles and activity sets that we were able to share the bounty with Women's Habitat and other families in need. Many thanks go out to all who contributed! On Wednesday December 22, Food Bank clients were provided with Stonegate Ministry's Annual Christmas card scripted with blessings for a joyful holiday and which included grocery gift cards for families to use to purchase additional food and supplies. The gratefulness and appreciation in the eyes of many of the families showed that our continuous service makes a difference in their lives especially during this second year of the pandemic.

Though times continue to be uncertain and discouraging at the moment, we are blessed to be amongst people who continue to do God's work in their everyday lives. It can be seen through the work of dedicated volunteers and the generosity and thoughtfulness of many donors trying to make a positive difference. But true blessing can be seen among those families in need, who continue to smile and give thanks even though their lives are filled with daily challenges and struggles.



*Jeannie Martinez,
Food Bank Co-Manager and Great Finds Manager*

PHYLLIS ORTIZ: A TRIBUTE

In 2010 the Stonegate **Prayer for You** ministry began under the leadership of Phyllis Ortiz, who led 7 faithful ecumenical women in intercessory prayer for all who requested via prayer4you@stonegateministry.ca or (416-255-6282). Phyllis has recently stepped down as leader of **Prayer for You** and we have been blessed by her leadership, friendship and faithful prayers and are so grateful for the God-given gifts she has shared with us at Stonegate Ministry.

We are pleased to announce that Carol-Anne Foty, a member of Prayer For You has accepted the leadership of this important ministry.

A MINISTRY PROGRAM UPDATE



Happy New Year Stonegate Ministry! I greet you with great enthusiasm and outlook for the year 2022. I am encouraged within myself to make intentional steps *towards joy, peace of mind and charity*, and in doing so I am determined to make this attitude as infectious as possible. It has been a wonderful start with Stonegate Ministry as I have witnessed the great effort that everyone has put forward.

Congratulations are in order for the team who worked relentlessly for our annual fundraising event which was indeed successful. It was a pleasure to hear the positive feedback and to know that Stonegate Ministry's impact is being felt, appreciated, and supported within our community.

I have had the opportunity to participate and witness the dynamic force of many of the programs that have been running effectively even during this unprecedented time. As Jeannie has reported, **CCSJ Food Pantry** was able to continue serving the community ensuring food security for our clients and adding an extra sparkle of hope and enjoyment to those receiving gifts for their children and a food voucher that they were able to use for a special family treat over the Christmas season.

As I interacted with each client during this past month, I couldn't help but feel the warmth that was conveyed by the program participants, confidently knowing that there were a few less things for them to worry about during this holiday season. I saw the faces of children light up as they received a book bag from the **Get Reading** program, and I stole a moment of joy for myself as I sang Christmas Carols led by Bruce Smith during the **Circle of Friends** Christmas Sing-A-Long day. Moments like these gave the opportunity for people to focus on and cherish the real message of Christmas - which is indeed the gift we all received through Christ our Lord.

We are not ignorant of the fact that a lot is still happening in our world. Many of us are coping with the challenges that are present and dealing with circumstances in life that we never imagined we would encounter. However, the gift of life and hope that Stonegate Ministry has faithfully provided over the years is needed now more than ever.

I urge us to come together and connect with each other during this time. We are stronger together and there are so many people who are eager to interact with us in a variety of ways. A simple way to start is to log on to our social media and *share* with your friends and family what you see *happening in Stonegate Ministry*. We want to let our community know that we are still here, and we care about them.

Natalie Sharpe,
Director of Ministry Programs



PRESSING ON WITH JOY THROUGH THIS PANDEMIC “GOD, COFFEE...AND ME??” - THE BEAT GOES ON . . .

We can all likely think of dozens of reasons to be disappointed, if not discouraged over the last two years. No one asked for a pandemic. We didn't get a vote. But this is life as it is today. And it seems this pandemic has presented a choice to many of us: curl up and *hibernate* or wake up and *celebrate*?

A celebration of my week is Tuesday afternoons at 3pm. Why? Because on Tuesday afternoons, we *congregate* online around the virtual coffee table to *meditate* on the message of Jesus in faith that he will *recreate* in and through our lives together.

For the past number of months, this faithful group has waded through 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Recently we have begun to journey through Matthew. As they press on, this little guide helps direct the conversation. You might find it helpful as well in your own personal study:

A Little Guide to Studying the Bible

1. What does it *say* (Observation)
 - about God
 - about the Kingdom of God
 - about people
 - about the people of God
2. What does it *mean* (Interpretation)
 - appreciating the context and setting, and in relation to the passages before and following.
3. What does it say *to me* (Application . . . putting on our **S.P.E.C.S.**)
 - is there a **Sin** to confess here?
 - Is there a **Promise** to claim?
 - Is there an **Example** to follow?
 - Is there a **Command** to obey?
 - Is there **Something** to give thanks for?



It's been said that trials, such as this pandemic, can either serve to make us **bitter** or make us **better**. My hope is that we will choose the latter, always finding reasons to celebrate and trusting that God is up to something deep and grand. Amen?

Bruce Smith, on assignment to Stonegate Ministry

CONTACT US

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

By cheque mailed to **Stonegate Ministry, 71 Riverview Gardens, Toronto, M6S 4E6** 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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