

NEWSLETTER

Encouragement, Reports, News & Updates

"Working Together To Build A Stronger,
Kinder and More Just Community"

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

THE FOOD PANTRY: FOOD ... AND MORE

I'm a fairly recent volunteer to the CCSJ Food Pantry, and I marvel at the opportunities it gives me to see God's love in action. On a recent Wednesday food bank day, one of our clients, Michael, sat down across from me for a file review to confirm his current contact information. He was a friendly fellow, with long grey hair and a generous beard. He readily provided the needed information, mentioning at one point that, for health reasons, he was required to attend



appointments at his local hospital six days a week. He expressed his thanks for the CCSJ food bank and for the opportunity to visit the church. He lowered his eyes, and his shoulders sagged as he leaned in and said, "You know, I've never been baptized." He mentioned that his parents had had religious upbringings, but that he himself hadn't been raised in the Christian faith.

Michael said that he had spoken previously with that 'nice fella', Reverend Hugh Reid (the Food Pantry's volunteer chaplain) and I suggested that Rev. Reid would be happy to explore baptism with him.

Michael looked at me and asked, "When I get baptized, would you be my sponsor?" I replied that it would be an honour, surprised, but thinking that this was a soon-to-be-forgotten request.

Five minutes later, Reverend Reid approached my table and asked if I would be willing to witness Michael's baptism that very afternoon. Ten minutes after that, the three of us were gathered around the baptismal font in the stillness of the sanctuary.

Reverend Reid prayed as he poured the pitcher of water into the font, asking Michael to confirm that he sought to be baptized. Michael did so enthusiastically. Reverend Reid then scooped up some water and lightly applied it to Michael's forehead while he delivered the baptismal blessing. Michael laughed as he felt the drops of water on his face. I was reminded of a child who delights in the coolness of a rain shower after a heat-filled day. Reverend Reid told a story of Christ's teachings about baptism. He ended with the words that have soothed my soul for the many years that I've participated in his services: "Never doubt how much you are loved." Then Michael gave us both big bear hugs.



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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.

(from Pg.1) Michael left the food bank laden with his food bank supplies but walking lightly in the reassurance that he was a child of God. I left the food bank that day awed by the unexpected moments of grace that God grants when we create a place to nourish both body and spirit. We both experienced firsthand the message of our Newsletter video: **"Things Grows Better with Love"**. (See below for link)

This is what the Food Pantry does, and this is why we at Stonegate Ministry are privileged to be a part of it.

Moira Grant
Board Chair

Moira is a long-term board member and has recently assumed the role of Board Chair. Moira is the representative of Kingsway Lambton United Church, one of our faithful member churches and has served as Board Secretary, on the Publicity team and recently a volunteer at the Food Pantry.

Link to short video **"Things GROW Better with Love"** <https://vimeo.com/968086091>
(Copy and paste link into your browser if it does not open)

PARK LAWN JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOL - HELPS THEIR COMMUNITY – 4,136 EGGS?



This past school year, a split class of grade 3 and 4 students from *Park Lawn Junior Middle School* have been coming to CCSJ Food Pantry monthly to drop off donations and help sort, break down and pack food in preparation for our food bank day. Led by their teacher, Ms. Andra Bulmanis, the students have been on a mission to help their neighbourhood after being made



aware of food insecurity within their school's community. Near the end of the school year, the class encouraged the *whole school* to do an **Egg Drive**. They challenged each class to collect as many eggs as they could for the Food Pantry. *Park Lawn JMS'* goal was to collect 1,000 eggs. Their efforts and enthusiasm were astounding! **They ended up collecting 4,136 eggs!** Due to their **Egg Drive**, we were able to provide families with extra eggs for several food bank days.

Thank you, *Park Lawn JMS!* Thank you also *Ms. Andra Bulmanis* and her class of amazing students who made a difference in the lives of people in need!

What a great example of how caring people of any age can make a difference.

Jeannie Martinez
Food Pantry Co-Director



Redressing Great Finds...our Clothing Ministry

For over thirty years, Stonegate Ministry has been dedicated to supporting the most vulnerable in our community. Providing affordable clothing through our **Great Finds** thrift store has been critical in addressing one of the most consistent needs in our community. Unfortunately, the pandemic forced us to close **Great Finds**, drastically limiting our ability to serve those in need. While we have continued offering some clothing assistance to asylum seekers and refugees at the food bank, the widespread availability of essential family clothing at affordable prices disappeared. This also meant the loss of *Benevolent Funding*, which had previously allowed us to provide free clothing to those unable to pay even the low prices.



The store operated with a dedicated team of store volunteers, and the modest revenue from store sales helped cover rent and staffing costs, which in turn helped to support other vital ministries. With these funds no longer available, we've faced significant challenges in maintaining these essential services.

Initially, we planned to lease a new retail space once the pandemic ended. However, despite our best efforts, we've encountered significant obstacles. The scarcity of available spaces, many of which have been taken over by cannabis stores, combined with the rising rental rates, has made finding an appropriate and affordable location nearly impossible.

After several years of searching, *an exciting new opportunity* has just emerged. The Ministry had never given any thought to purchasing our own facility, given the large initial cost, until another Christian charity approached us with the possibility of purchasing their premises. While we cannot disclose the exact location at this time, Stonegate Ministry is seriously considering this option and has begun exploring possible financing for the purchase.

As God continues to lead us, and if the possibility becomes a reality, we will need support from both our member churches and our faithful individual supporters. This will include both physical and financial contributions to do the necessary renovations, particularly providing an accessible washroom and lift.

In light of the current widespread decline in charitable support, many organizations are turning to 'charity bonds.' We will consider offering these bonds which offer a typical return of 4 to 5%, significantly higher than the 1 or 2% offered by banks. This approach allows supporters to be an integral part of this opportunity while still earning income for their own needs.

We have sensed God's hand in this *completely unexpected* opportunity and have observed obstacles fade away as we have proceeded through our due diligence. Please join us in prayer through this process as we anticipate that it will align with God's plan for our ministry and our community.

Peter Patterson,
Treasurer



Even More: “FOOD ... and MORE”

On a recent Saturday at *the Food Pantry*, I was in my usual spot greeting and directing clients when one of our regulars appeared at the doorway. I greeted him by name, said it was nice to see him, and asked him how things were going. He said, “I’m alive.” I answered, “That makes two of us”, and after a pause I added, “it has certain advantages.” He replied, “*Like being here...this is a blessing.*”

And it continues to be a blessing - the visible fruit of God’s grace, to serve at the foodbank. Individuals from many challenging life situations, refugees, new immigrants, young families, and just people going through challenging patches are served not only with food, but with dignity and warmth, giving them some sense of control in their lives.



We feed people on many levels. It was a pleasant challenge to explain to a Turkish man via *Google Translate* who was seeking to know more about the Christian faith. And it was a joy to baptize a man (with the help of the chair of Stonegate Ministry, Moira Grant) who wanted to be sure that he was acceptable to Jesus. He said it was the greatest day of his life. (I suggested he may want to rephrase that when he tells his wife).

Life is affirmed in many ways. One in particular is the number of teenagers like the one shown here who have been volunteering through the summer. As some of our regular volunteers go on holidays, these young folks give up their summer days to work at the foodbank and they fit in beautifully. I was given a reminder of how old I was. When a bowl fell and smashed on the floor. I asked one teen, Paul, who puts in thousands of steps working the stock room, if there were any newspaper in the back to wrap the shards in. He asked, “What’s newspaper?”

The Foodbank continues to be a place where we learn, serve, and come to know our fellow human beings of all ages and many walks of life. Thank you for supporting a place where it is truly a blessing to serve.

Rev. Hugh D. Reid
Volunteer Food Pantry Chaplain



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You can contribute: - Online on our website www.stonegateministry.ca

- by e-Transfer to donations@stonegateministry.ca

- by cheque mailed to 71 Riverview Gardens, Toronto, M6S 4E6

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