



NEWSLETTER

Encouragement, Reports, News & Updates

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

" When you pray... move your feet"

I encountered this proverb only recently, and I was struck by its simplicity and depth. Its origins are contested, though many authors believe it to be West African. I appreciate its acknowledgement of the importance of prayer and the certainty with which it does so. (*When* you pray, and *not if*). Stonegate Ministry, partners with Christ Church St. James Food Pantry and our clients have certainly benefited from the ongoing prayers of our supporters and partners. Thank you for your faithfulness.

But this proverb also suggests that prayer can be strengthened by action. We see evidence of this in the growing interest in supporting the Food Pantry: visits from local school students; offers of provisions from local food suppliers; donations of gift cards and funds; and offers to help in setting up for the next food bank.



It's all quite timely, too. In its recent 'Who's Hungry 2024' publication, the Daily Bread Food Bank reports an increase of nearly 1 million visits to Toronto food banks in the previous year – *a 273% increase since before Covid*. Among the report's key findings are the following:

- *More than 1 in 10 Torontonians use food banks to make ends meet*
- *The number of unhoused clients has quadrupled, and clients from emergency shelters are almost double compared to last year*
- *4 out of 5 new food bank clients are newcomers to Canada*
- *Nearly 1 in 4 clients are children or youth*
- *Over 1 in 4 clients have recently gone a whole day without eating.*

I see the up-close-and-personal side of these statistics in the new clients who register with the Food Pantry: the earnest young job-seeker who reminds me of my son; the older woman whose family breakup has left her alone and vulnerable; the proud ex-military newcomer who is initially resentful at having to provide the personal information required to register and, yet, tearfully thankful once he is welcomed to proceed to the food collection area. The 'Who's Hungry 2024' report concludes with a *Call to Action*, outlining the ways that individuals, organizations and governments at all levels can help to address this unparalleled 'grim' situation. Stonegate Ministry is trying to do its part by sharing the report, providing financial and human resources for the Food Pantry, and advocating for change through its outreach and community programs. We are entering a period of growth - and not a moment too soon.

We are grateful for your support. It is essential. And please pray for us – absolutely.

But move your feet, too, as you are able.

Moira Grant
Board Chair



Where Would We Be Without Community?

A. The Circle of Friends

Every Tuesday, a grand group of women gather around a meal table at Christ Church St James. Even during the winter months, when it would be so much easier to stay home, they joyfully come. Why? Is it because of the food? the games, the programs? The short answer: it is because of their common unity. They simply love one another. They love being together.

In a world where there is so much isolation, loneliness, despair and disillusionment, the *Circle of Friends* is like sunshine breaking through the fog. We thank God for the faithful leadership of Sue, Katherine and Brandy.....their dedication is second to none.



B. God, Coffee and me

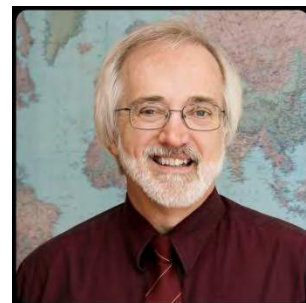
Also on Tuesday afternoons, *another* group gathers, this time in *Nimmans Thai Restaurant* on the Lakeshore. They have been meeting for years now as a growing community that studies and prays together. What drew them together in the first place was this invitation:

***"Come to chat about Jesus ...who He is, what He's done...
...& what life might look like if we got acquainted."***

Those who come realize that by reading the Gospel in community we can gain a deeper understanding of the good news. Insights are shared and questions are freely asked, as well as anything we may be struggling to understand. As a result, community is strengthened, and our own lives are the better for it. As we often pray 'Lord may something we read here today help shape how we live our lives tomorrow'. We all need community. No one was meant to 'do life alone'. In fact, we are *made* for community. May these circles grow all the wider and all the more welcoming.

***"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.
And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage
one another."*** (Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT))

Bruce Smith
On Assignment to Stonegate Ministry



The Summer Sizzler

Saturday May 24th, – games for children, music to enjoy, free hot dogs and ice cream for all. Hope we see you there!

Everything begins at 1:00 pm outside Christ Church St James at 194 Park Lawn Rd. and continues until 4:00pm.

The Sizzler began 25 years ago, in the former Berry Rd. Mall, just outside the Stonegate Ministry store (now Great Finds).

As I Cling to the Old Rugged Cross

Growing up, it was deep-rooted in my mind that church was a place I *had* to go to on Sundays. My mother did not give me a choice. I was obligated to go. There were times when I would be filled with boredom, resentment, and even anger while sitting on a pew waiting for the mass to finish. The only time I ever liked going to church was on Good Friday when few would attend the service of praying and pausing at each of the 13 Stations of the Cross. It was always quiet. The lights were always turned down low and it was then when two of my favourite hymns were sung – ‘**Were You There**’ and ‘**On a Hill Far Away Stood an Old Rugged Cross**’.



How my mother went about teaching God’s love was neither welcomed nor understood. Now, with a child of my own, I have found my own path and relationship with the Lord and how I share that with my son and with others. I have wandered away from the Lord many times feeling I was not getting what I wanted from Him. I wanted to be heard. I wanted to be cared for. I wanted to matter to Him. Looking back, I realize that no matter how often I wandered away, the Lord always led me back to Him. He was always there *in the background* guiding me, being patient with me, and caring for me.

When things get challenging and overwhelming, it’s easy to lose hope and faith. Working at the food bank, I see many people struggling to survive the stresses of life. There are times when I can sense the weight and burden on their shoulders and see the dimness in their eyes. I can feel their need to be heard,



to have someone care for them, and to know that they matter. When I say their name and tell them that we can help them that day, I can see the relief in their face because *someone cared* - and *their needs were heard*.

That is why this work to help others is so important. Every time you volunteer at the food bank or at a program, or donate a food item, or give money to help buy supplies, it’s like you are there *in the background* – guiding, being patient and caring - just like the Lord. Wherever there is strife, struggle, and pain, we can help carry the cross for those who lack the strength.

So as Easter drew near, I found myself softly singing my favourite hymns. I thought about Jesus and the trials and tribulations He went through because He loved us, and I *cling* to the thought of that old rugged cross and have hope and faith that someday I’ll *exchange it for a crown*’.

Jeannie Martinez
CCSJ Food Pantry Co-Director



The Food Pantry is a place where people go when they are facing challenges. There are many kinds of challenges and many kinds of people. We try to honour, respect, and support them all as beloved children of God.

As the volunteer Chaplain, one of my roles has become the downstairs greeter. I welcome folks with a warm smile, their name when I know it, and help direct them to where they will be served. I've been trying to learn a few words of different languages to make my welcome as comforting and familiar as possible.



I've learned some Farsi, took a stab at Albanian, Italian, and Spanish. French was easier, though I have to say I was impressed by Jeannie's facility in French when we were supporting a woman from Brazil. But the language on which I've been working the hardest is Ukrainian. We have so many Ukrainian refugees.

Often as a person arrives, I'll ask how they are. Many will say "fine". Miguel will always say "I'm ALIVE!". For the Ukrainians, it is often "*Dobra*" meaning good. Sometimes "*Se Dobra*" meaning very good (my own phonetic spelling). But sometimes their expression will change, and they'll speak of family in the Ukraine undergoing bombing or loved ones on battlefields. It is obvious they are with us because of a dislocating and criminal tragedy unfolding in their homeland. Travelling across an ocean, learning a new language and ways to survive, it is an impressive story of **Resilience**.

On the first food bank after Easter, several Ukrainian regulars greeted me with a smile and a phrase that I didn't know. I guessed - and replied with enthusiasm, "*Risen Indeed!*". I then went to some of our Ukrainian volunteers and learned the words and started greeting people with "*Christos Voskres!*". They would break out into a beaming smile and answer, "*Voyeastinoo Voskres!*" - (Risen Indeed!). It was heartwarming. I was moved when families with children arrived and to a person, children included, they would smile and say "*Voyeastinoo Voskres!*"

They face tragedy, dislocation, uncertainty, and many other challenges but they have a source of **Resilience** which is a living hope. Resilience with a capital "**R**": Resurrection faith. It was a moment of eternal joy celebrated in a foodbank. The kind of joy, hope, and strength that stays with you through it all.

May Easter bless you,

Rev. Hugh Reid,
Food Pantry Chaplain (Volunteer)



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- by e-Transfer to donations@stonegateministry.ca

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

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