

Inside this issue:

Reflecting on Community Meals 01

Encampment to Housing 02

Celebrating 30 years 03

The New FUN Page 07

Financial Update 08

CITY OF REFUGE

MY CHURCH AND MY COMMUNITY by Thea Prescod

When I was in my late teens and early twenties, I came to this community and fell in love.

I fell in love with my new friends, who constantly amazed me with their wisdom and courage. I fell in love with a church where I could be completely myself. Fell in love with a community where people, imperfectly, tried to flip the power dynamics that exist in most of the world.

Then, at Thursday night dinners, we would have around 70 seats set at tables for our family style meal, but they were never all full. Each table had a "host" who would welcome newcomers, help people pass around trays full of food, and help with the overall evening flow. It never really seemed to matter that some of our table hosts had come from jobs at a graphic design firm while others had come from panhandling that afternoon.

Back in those days, we all took turns cooking on a creaky electric range, and hand-washing dishes in a large sink. Some of my earliest memories of building friendships are of when I was on dish duty. I'd come straight from work and head to the kitchen right away, two or three of us washing dishes and putting them away for almost four hours straight. The stories we told each other those nights, and the ways we got to know each other, made dishwashing a truly sacred time. It was one of the places our community educated me – about Toronto, about faith, and about...well, life.



Now, decades later, many of my friends from those days are no longer with us. Looking at the pictures inside this issue brings a heartache that's so tangible it burns. There are so many people that I miss being with. On Thursday nights, we no longer try to make 70 meals on a family style range. Instead, Donald and his team make 250 individual servings for our community. And they use professional ovens and stoves, where they don't have to pray before cooking for God to "please make all of the burners work this time." Donald still works hard to make the kitchen a place of genuine friendship, where people can be themselves, and share in deep ways.

With the pandemic, we're no longer sitting around shared tables, and instead are serving food outside in takeout containers. But when I stop and watch during a mealtime, both our staff and our regulars seem to share "host duties" in beautiful ways. Newcomers are welcomed, whether they come wearing suits or clothes that haven't been taken off in weeks. Lives are shared, albeit imperfectly. There are a lot of ways we have changed in 30 years, but something of our heart seems to remain. And for that, I'm deeply grateful.

Celebrating 30 years

In Conversation with Flyin' Brian by Rachel Tulloch

What was your early experience like at Sanctuary?

Well, when we first came in, it was the brew crew. We were all staying in different hostels and we didn't have anywhere we could really connect because you had to be out of the hostels during the day. A lot of us were playing dice and cards and stuff like that and there was a lot of drinking. We drank a lot of sherry back then. And we just kind of moved around the city and we kind of wandered in here at Sanctuary and met people. We came in to check it out and basically it was just a place to come at first and just play cards and play dice, and then we started eating here all the time and the friendships kind of moved on from there. This was a place you could come and sit and enjoy each other's company...we didn't have that because you couldn't go visit people in a hostel, so you were always on the street. This was all close to 30 years ago.

How have things changed?

At first, it was mostly food and clothing. But the community has always been building. Like they started having community nights, with the band, and I think you got to know people more socially, also like outside when people were just relaxing more. It shows you more community because it's not like the door just closes and everyone goes home. There's more to it than that. People would go to other's houses. The friendship aspect. I didn't but others did. I was Flyin' Brian, I would just go everywhere! I was here with the boys one day and somewhere else another day but I would always use this as a home base. But Sanctuary has grown from just feeding people to helping more, to advocacy and moral support. It's not like you close your doors at the end of 5 o'clock and it's over. It's more than that. People are quite caring that way. And it's just been a natural evolution. Getting to know the community and then following where that leads.

How would you like to see us evolve?

Housing. Something permanent for people, like maybe bachelor apartments or even those big shipping containers. There are great friends here, but I find that a lot of the friends I came here with are dead now, and that's the hard thing to swallow. And I attribute it to lack of housing. You can't have a job or do education or maintain your health or spirituality or anything because if you don't have a roof over your head, you can't maintain any of that. And that comes down to people's happiness. A lot of my friends have died, and honestly, I'm kind of reeling from it this year especially.

Anything else you'd like to say?

I remember one story when Marvin cut his finger on a beer can and he didn't want to admit it so he told the staff he got bit by a raccoon, and he even went and got the rabies shot because he didn't want to admit that he was drinking that day. And then he finally 'fessed up when he had to go back for a second shot! Of all things, he followed it through and even got a rabies shot to hide he was drinking all the time, even though everyone already knew he was. But it's because he was making good friends and didn't want to wreck that, right?



Brian (left) and Dennis

of Sanctuary

“Sancty” by Constantin Socalski

Well to start off with, I would like to say that Sanctuary or “Sancty” (as it has become known in my life) carries a huge importance to me because this place has been my only constant since I got here almost 26 years ago – and that is an impressive achievement.

All of this history thankfully started with YouthLink, when they decided to give me a Big Brother in January of 1996 and by the time September rolled around, he decided to show me where he worked and that is how it started, my new family that I call home. I think that Sancty is going to be my home for a really long time to come because it has become a family to me since the majority of my family is in Romania. For my need of a family, I consciously decided to put all of my energy here, where I know I can live it.

My start was very rough because at that point I was very immature, even though I was in my late teens. I was climbing trees and running around while the services were in progress, never mind listening to them. There were numerous incidences of me pushing their boundaries to the max. They were really good for putting up with me.

I remember Big Steve (as we all called him), he was the strictest of them all. He laid the law pretty hard at times, and even sent me home and banned me from some events. At that time I was very resentful of what was happening, and really hurt by it. But looking back at everything that happened, I do appreciate his strictness very much because if it were not for all of his strictness I have no doubt that I would not be there to this day. But I am thankful to God for their mercy. It would definitely be a massive disaster if I lost Sancty.

Now about helping people at Sancty, I have worked very hard to earn their trust. Shovelling the snow in the winter for the cars to be able to come in, and in the summer raking the leaves from the tree that we used to have. Man, how many fun hours I had up there. My volunteering here over the past 13 years has taught me the value of meekness and serving others.

If I could, I would definitely live at Sancty with everyone, like the monks do, because I cannot get enough of this joy that I experience here (I do not know if this is more exciting than driving, because that in itself is a blast).



Celebrating 30 years



of Sanctuary!



Encampments to Housing

by Lorraine Lam

We had tents on our property even before COVID-19. There were no alternative options, and camping at Sanctuary was their most viable option for home. There was a lot of tension in the neighbourhood and mixed reactions towards the tents. After many conversations with our neighbours and our local councillor, it was decided those tents had to come down in January 2020. Each tent dweller was offered a rent supplement from the city in hopes of securing housing.

When the pandemic locked down Toronto a few months later, those friends who had camped on our property still had no housing. As many resources in the city shut down, community members, once again, set up tents here - near where they could access supports and resources (the closest public bathroom was a 15-minute walk from us!). Before we knew it, Sanctuary's front parking pad, backyard, and the city parkette beside us would become home to over 50 tents: a sanctuary and haven for many of our community members.

Rob is one of our friends who lived in the encampments. He says, "It was stressful, but yet it felt safe at the same time. It was a group of family folk who I could trust to watch my stuff if I had to run an errand or get to an appointment. It was community-oriented and felt like a small well-knit neighbourhood. We looked out for each other the best we could."

As COVID-19 raged on, the City of Toronto eventually signed leases with several hotels and converted them into temporary shelter spaces. This created indoor options for many unhoused people who were living in encampments, riding transit and sleeping in the ravine. On April 30, 2020, 41 individuals in the Sanctuary encampment were moved into temporary spaces. Today, ten of these people have their own apartments and leases.

Rob says, "It is so nice to have a door that locks behind me, and not to have to worry about all the uncertainties. I feel safe everyday, I can be with my dog, hang pictures up on my wall, and I can even do laundry! I worked hard and I'm really proud of myself and the others. COVID-19 ended up having a silver lining."

As we enter Spring, I am grateful for housing that a number of our friends now have. Would you join us in prayer in celebrating those joyous milestones, and continue to pray for opportunities and options for many of our friends to get housing of their own?



The FUN Page

Have you heard the one about...?

Did you hear about the old man that died in his own library from all his books falling on top of him? He had no one to blame but his shelf.

-Dougie

Did you hear that three monkeys at the San Diego Zoo were lighting their own feces on fire and throwing it at the zookeepers? Well, apparently three of the zookeepers had to go to the hospital for turd degree burns.

-Dougie

There's this husband and wife who have been married for five years. Every morning the wife gets up and makes the coffee and breakfast. Her husband comes down later and has breakfast with his wife. When they finish, he always turns to his wife and says, "Honey, good breakfast, good coffee, I appreciate it." Well, one day she turns to him and says, "Forget it! I'm not making the coffee anymore." This blows him away. He doesn't understand it. "but Honey," he says, "Every morning you make the breakfast and coffee, and I always thank you." She says, "I don't care. I am NOT making the coffee anymore. YOU are. Because I found out that in the Bible, men make the coffee. And I can prove it." The husband thinks about this for a minute, then he says, "I'll tell you what. If you can show me where in the Bible it says that men make the coffee, I will make it every morning." This makes the wife smile. She gets up and pulls the Bible off the bookshelf, and opens it to the book of He...brews.

-Richard

Sketches by Jay

"I taught myself to draw. For five years everyday I would just be sitting there because I was homeless and had nothing else to do, except get in trouble, so I decided to just sit there. That's it. I just did trial and error and that's how I got to where I am now. I tried everything that didn't work and found out what part did, and then I learned a few things about visual vocabulary and shading and stuff. I read a couple of books that I bought at Indigo - I never got to read the whole book though because I didn't have glasses or whatever - so I only read the bold printed chapter names."



Jay has been part of the Sanctuary community for many years, and is currently part of our contract staff team.

Financial Update

by Thea Prescod
Interim Executive Director

Many of us began 2021 hoping that the end of the pandemic was within reach. At Sanctuary, after our increased expenses of 2020, we were hoping for an end to the increased costs of COVID. Instead, COVID continued to create record-breaking costs, with us spending around a quarter of a million dollars on COVID-related expenses. In addition to this, drop-in and outreach costs also increased, as the size and needs of our community continued to grow.

In response, you — our supporters, our donors, our friends — gave. In our 30 years of existence, the only time that both our expenses and our donations were higher than in 2021 was in 2020. This back-to-back experience of your generosity is amazing and humbling, as we know that 2021 was a financially challenging year for many people.

I also want to take the opportunity here to add a personal note. As I have started 2022 in this new position on an interim basis, I feel very grateful that we aren't starting the year worried about our financial sustainability. With so much to learn, and so many things that cause me daily concern, it's a relief to be resting on the faithfulness of our extended community. The constancy of both your ongoing prayers and your financial support is what makes it possible for me to breathe, to learn, and to grow in this season, and trust that God will meet us in the areas of our need.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Ways to Help

How to Donate

By credit card: donate.sanctuarytoronto.ca

By automatic monthly debit: complete the form at tinyurl.com/sanctuaryPAG

By cheque or money order payable to Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto



Donate A Car Canada

Go to www.donatecar.ca or call 1-877-250-4904.

Tax receipts for all eligible gifts will be sent at year end (charitable# 890379340 RR0001)

Follow us on social media and check out our blog

Website: www.sanctuarytoronto.ca

Facebook: @sanctuarytoronto

Instagram: @sanctuaryto

Twitter: @SanctuaryTO

Board Members

Alison Marthinsen

Pamela Thomson

Cindy Quinton

Michael Blair

Simon Beck

Sylvia Keesmaat

25 Charles Street East, Toronto, ON M4Y 1R9
T: 416 922 0628 F: 416 922 4961
E: info@sanctuarytoronto.ca

[SANCTUARY]

www.sanctuarytoronto.ca