



# NEWSLETTER

Encouragement, Reports, News & Updates

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

## A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

Last December, I had the privilege of handing out Stonegate Ministry’s annual Christmas cards to clients of the Christ Church St. James Food Pantry. Each greeting card is accompanied by a grocery gift card as part of our Food Vouchers program. Some clients approached my table tentatively, not quite sure why they had been directed there by our staff at the registration desk. Others walked over with a shy smile, perhaps knowing about the gift that awaited them.

One young woman seemed completely surprised to learn about the gift card. She stood there, teary-eyed, thanking me over and over. I was sure to mention that it was Stonegate Ministry’s caring donors who had made our Food Vouchers program possible. Other clients were memorable, too: the young boy who jumped with joy when his mother told him that now they could buy his favourite snack; the older woman who shyly tucked the card away in her purse with a serene smile on her face; the couple who needed to be reassured that there were no strings attached and that the card was a gift from complete strangers who loved them. I found myself wishing that every one of our donors could have been there that day to receive the heartfelt thanks that their support had prompted.

If you have been wondering how you can help to address the record-breaking demand for food bank services that we are experiencing at the Food Pantry and in Toronto in general, please consider donating to Stonegate Ministry’s Food Voucher program, or to the Food Pantry itself. Visit our ‘Donate’ page at [stonegateministry.ca](https://stonegateministry.ca) for instructions on giving by e-Transfer, credit card, or mailed cheque and be sure to indicate where you would like to direct your support.

We have also been blessed with generous contributions and toy drives in support of our Toy Mountain campaign in which each child in a Food Pantry family receives a Christmas gift. Approximately 40% of the people served by the Food Pantry are children, so we are proud to be able to bring smiles to their families' faces, thanks to our supporters.



[Click Picture to  
View Video](#)

Good things happen at the Food Pantry at Christmas – and every day. Thank you for being a part of Stonegate Ministry’s work in our community, especially at this time of year when need is felt so acutely.

We wish you a happy and blessed Christmas!

Moira Grant,  
Board Chair



### 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.

## A MERRY CHRISTMAS ?

Christmas – a time when most look forward to fun filled family gatherings, gifts under the tree and Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. But **the reality of food insecurity changes things**. Parents dread seeing the dashed hopes of children when there will be no Christmas tree - let alone presents underneath it, and the kids know that their schoolmates will be asking what exciting gifts they got for Christmas. Those who live alone feel an increased sense of loneliness. No wonder that some find Christmas a stressful time. To make this season *less stressful* and *more joyful* for the families and individuals whom we serve, here is what **your generous support** allows us to provide:

- **\$13,000 of Food vouchers** are given out to all clients - \$60 for larger families and \$30 for smaller families - allowing them to purchase *with dignity* the food that suits their own customs and culture.
- **Turkeys, chickens and hams** are a treat and replace the regularly offered meat products.
- The **TOY MOUNTAIN** of up to 500 toys are distributed to the children of Food Pantry clients.
- Over **275 'Good Food'** boxes, filled with fresh vegetables and fruit, are distributed to all our clients who wish them at Christmas – in partnership with the Stonegate Community Health Centre.

Thank you for thinking of our clients and providing generously to make a difference in the lives of moms, dads, children and lonely singles this advent season. We wish you God's blessing and presence as we celebrate Jesus's coming.



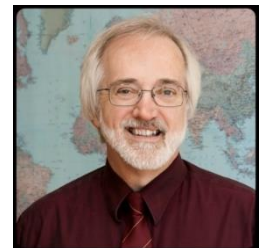
Graeme Quigley  
Board Vice Chair

## WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS? ... an update on "God, Coffee and Me"



After our coffees have arrived, we dive into another episode of the life of Jesus and receive more answers than we could have possibly anticipated. Most recently we've tried to imagine ourselves in the sandals of those first disciples. We've been awestruck with the authority and the peace of Jesus. We encounter a man with leprosy, another who is paralyzed, another being severely tormented. We find ourselves straining at the oars during a life-threatening storm; we feel the desperation of a father who has a child on the brink; we ache for a woman who had been marginalized for 12 years....and then we stand back...*as Jesus steps in!*

The 'awe' moments' are many. We pause. We think of people in our lives who are struggling, hurting, facing enormous challenges. Perhaps it becomes a bit more personal for some of us around the table: job loss, health concerns, problems at home, depression, fear, and worries. We find ourselves listening, caring, praying.... right there together, in *Nimmans' Thai Restaurant* on the Lakeshore.



'So, what's so good about the good news?' It is so very personal, practical, and possible! The gospel reminds us that "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever". In knowing that, life suddenly becomes all the brighter and all the lighter. May this little light on the Lakeshore continue to shine weekly, out in the open at *Nimman's Thai Restaurant*.

Bruce Smith,  
On Assignment to Stonegate Ministry

As the end of the year approaches, the focus of Jesus' birth at Christmas brings forth reflection and promises of new resolutions. This was a tough year for me. It was a year that challenged my spirit and my faith. I cried many times, not only from the pain in my body, but from the pain in my heart and my soul. This year I have felt so much hurt from life's disillusion, disappointments and betrayal – so much so that I broke down and begged God to take these burdens from me.

And do you know what God's reply was?

He said, *'Jeannie, to help you with the pain in your heart, I will let you get to know Lian'.*

Lian is 8 years old. Over a year ago Lian's family of five fled Uganda and arrived as refugees here in Canada. With hardly any money, Lian's family needed the services of our food bank. Recently, they were given permanent residency and though his parents were able to secure employment, they still need the use of our food bank to make ends meet. Lian recently wrote down all the names of his family and my name was written in that circle. Lian says that I am part of his family. My heart feels only joy when I see Lian.

Then God said to me, *'Jeannie, to help you with the pain in your body, I will let you get to know an elderly man named Valentin'.*

Using his walker, Valentin travels by bus to our food bank to get food for his wife, daughter and grandchildren. Valentin has cancer. Last month, he brought a copy of his x-rays to show me the masses he has in his chest. His doctor has told him that he has 8 months to live. Valentin kisses my hand and gives me a hug at every food bank and despite the pain in his body, he never misses a food bank to get food for his family. I feel no pain in my body when I see Valentin.

And for my soul, Lord? How can you heal the pain in my soul? And the Lord said, *'Jeannie, I will send you a man that represents all who come to the church and use the food bank'.*

After getting his food, a man who I had helped register, came to me to say with such heartfelt relief and gratitude. that *I had saved him*. I saved *him*? I had simply greeted him, registered him and assured him that he would get food that day.

In truth, he 'saved' me. In truth, the people who come for food bless me and nourish my soul. Through them, God has taught me grace, faith, love and humility. Through them, God has shown me what is good. And because of them, I endeavour to act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with my God.

Jeannie Martinez

CCSJ Food Pantry Co-Director



## GET READING!

Did you know that this fall, 2024, marks the 5th anniversary of the Get Reading! program? The program's aim is to encourage literacy in children and is sponsored by Stonegate Ministry at the Food Pantry.

One auspicious day during the fall of 2019, Sue Iaboni, a neighbourhood resident and Samantha Coelho, then Stonegate Ministry's Program Director, were walking near the church when they remarked on the line-up of



people with several bored children waiting for their turn at the food bank. What could be done to help those kids? Maybe we could take advantage of their time in line by giving them a book to read?

What began 5 years ago, with a few books donated by relatives and church attendees is now a large undertaking. We have grown to serve about 150 children of all ages, with a volunteer staff of 4. Our list of book donors includes public libraries, retired schoolteachers, high school students serving their community hours, the Toronto Book Bank, and neighbours dropping by to fill our book box in the church lobby.

Our program is enjoyed by children and adults alike. One regular customer always chooses a book for her grand daughter who is in her "terrible twos" but can't wait to settle down with Grandma for story time. A couple of young boys rush to the table looking for Superman books. Several girls want fairy stories, preferably with a princess dressed in pink. A father and son search for books on things that go: cars, trains, boats, planes. Dinosaur tales fly off the table. A mother asks for books in French so her son can learn his parents' language. Newcomers to Canada use their children's books to help them learn a new language.

Although our main focus is on literacy for children, there is a small selection of books for adult readers. James Patterson, Steven King and Agatha Christie books disappear quickly. We get a lot of requests for ESL material, as well as word search books and dictionaries.

This program helps in other ways too. Our readers often engage in conversation about their families and the books they or their children have read. Sometimes they bring books back to share with others. A few clients discuss their own writing experiences. The visit to the food bank is more than about food for the stomach— it is food for the mind as well.



Sue Iaboni

Volunteer director of GET READING

## CONTACT US

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You can contribute: - Online on our website [www.stonegatemistry.ca](http://www.stonegatemistry.ca)

- by e-Transfer to [donations@stonegatemistry.ca](mailto:donations@stonegatemistry.ca)

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

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