

Dear friends,

The past months have been very eventful ones for our community at St. Francis Table. Our Capuchin Outreach office opened its doors in September, offering counseling, referral to detox and treatment programs, personal advocacy, and life skills development to people who have addictions to alcohol, crack cocaine, or prescription drugs. Housing and shelter remain a great challenge as rents remain high and no local emergency shelters are running this year.

At St. Francis Table we will be saying goodbye to Fiona Crawford who will be returning to full time studies after working with us for the past 3 years. Fiona will certainly be missed by us all and we wish her the best of luck in all she does. Since joining our staff in January 2001, Fiona has helped cook 136,827 meals for our brothers and sisters in Parkdale!

On behalf of all whom we serve I thank you, our benefactors, for your continued support and wish you all the best as we begin the season of Advent in anticipation of the feast of Christmas. As I meet with our patrons and other service providers in the area I am constantly told how important St. Francis Table is to the community. Besides the importance of food distribution to a vulnerable group, the spirit of peace, goodness, and joy are very much alive at the Table and enriches the lives of patrons and volunteers alike. Our success is thanks to all of those who support us through charity and service, and to all of you I say thank you and ask that you continue to pray for us and our ministry to the poor of Parkdale.

Peace,

Gerry McGilly

(416) 533-4172



Capuchin Outreach to the Poor was founded in 1987 by the Capuchin Franciscan Friars with the vision of creating a faith community with the poor by providing direct services that seek to enhance the sense of human dignity of those who are in need.

St. Francis Table serves on average 250 meals a day, six days per week in Toronto's Parkdale community. Patrons are asked to make a \$1 donation towards their meal and are provided with full restaurant service in a comfortable and pleasant environment. Soup, a choice of entrees followed by dessert and coffee or tea are the everyday fare of St. Francis Table.

The *St. Clare Centre*, next door to 'The Table', is a drop-in centre and tea room for our patrons. St. Clare Centre also hosts a weekly Alcoholics anonymous meeting, monthly foot clinics, as well as everyday chess and cribbage games.

The *Capuchin Outreach* program provides direct service and supportive advocacy to those who are in need. This newest reflection of our outreach involves our mentorship program, assistance with housing, life skills, budgeting, and spiritual development opportunities for those who are willing and able to work towards personal independence and a more healthy and positive lifestyle.

Capuchin Outreach to the Poor (Parkdale) is a registered charitable organization (#11883-7970-RR0001). We receive no government funding, instead relying on the charity of private individuals and businesses for our income.



Christmas Newsletter 2003



Capuchin Outreach to the Poor

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From Bro. Alan's desk...

The first reading this Christmas Eve is taken from Isaiah and in part reads:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shone.

You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

While the scriptures refer to the coming of the Messiah and the hope of the Hebrew people, we might also want to ask ourselves if we as people of peace and goodwill have been faithful in bearing that great light into our world?

The Gospel reading from Luke tells the familiar and comforting story of Joseph and Mary's journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. But what might that journey look like today? Permit me some interpretive latitude...

In these days a decree went out that everyone should be registered if they were to receive government benefits and support. Joseph an unemployed carpenter went to the government offices in our city to be registered, along with Mary who was expectant with their child. But Joseph and Mary were told that because they were homeless and had no address, they could not qualify for government benefits and support beyond the meagre emergency amount (which would not last even a week).

It was a cold December and tonight the offices would close for the Christmas Holidays. The wind was beginning to gust from off the lake as they trudged down the streets, their threadbare clothes affording them no real protection from the elements. First one shelter, then another and yet another turned them away; all were full to capacity. As the sky darkened and night overtook our city many of the inhabitants warmed up to their Christmas trees with warm glasses of hot chocolate, cider or a hot toddy.

In an out of the way parking garage downtown Joseph and Mary found a small corner out of the wind and took refuge for the night. It was there, huddled together out of sight and out of mind that Mary felt the pangs of

child birth. Joseph, hesitant to leave, said a silent prayer and headed out into the night to seek help for Mary and their soon to be born child. It was there that cold Christmas morning that the E.M.S. crew and a police officer were found rejoicing in the birth of a child, wrapped in yesterday's newspaper to protect it from the cold. In the midst of those overwhelming odds a new life, full of potential announced itself to the world through the gentle cry of an unknown child.

We must ask ourselves if we've done everything within our means and circumstances to bring light, peace, goodwill and life to our brothers and sisters who struggle to merely survive in our city? Through your faithful and steadfast support, we at Capuchin Outreach – St. Francis Table stand with you and rejoice knowing that we continue to do our parts and that we are carrying a great light into our streets, our city and our world.

May your Christmas be one full of light, joy, peace and hope!

Bro. Alan

DONATIONS

St Francis Table and Capuchin Outreach depend on the charity of private individuals, businesses, and foundations. We thank you all for your continued support and generosity.

Some Tax Receipts for donations received have been mailed with this newsletter. Any remaining receipts for 2003 will be mailed by February 2004. Any questions regarding donations can be directed to Gerry at (416) 533-4172.



Happy
Christmas
From your
friends at
St. Francis
Table

