

December 2008

ST. MARY of EGYPT REFUGE



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There was room at the inn....



There was room at the inn. You helped make it so.

This year, we had room at the Refuge for children of all ages, families, young girls, people recovering from addiction, women, men. And yes, in welcoming people, we discover anew that Hope is born among us. (Look inside for photos and stories.)

We aren't yet able to have the Inn open every day. We lament that. With your support and prayers, we will work towards that.



Merry Christmas!



Summer Retreat for Kids at St. Mary of Egypt Refuge

This past summer marked a milestone for St. Mary of Egypt Refuge – the first kids-only retreat. What was merely a conversation last year between Mary and myself, became a reality that surpassed even our idealistic dreams this year.

The three night, four day adventure began with a terrified group of inner-city teenage girls clamouring to enter the front door of the Refuge house to escape the bothersome bugs and ended with them begging to have one last fishing excursion by the river before we had to leave. In such a short space of time, the transformation was truly amazing to witness.



The theme of the retreat was 'receiving and giving' with a focus on all that there is to be grateful for in the world, as well as the gifts the girls have to offer the world. In addition to marshmallow-roasting, canoeing (a first-time experience for all of them – thank you Johann!), fishing, hiking and swimming, the girls were also supervised in meal preparation, with an emphasis on wholesome, healthy cooking.



On the last day, the girls were asked to share something meaningful that they would take away with them from this experience. One of the girls expressed how much she enjoyed eating together at the dining room table each day. Though she comes from a large family of four children, she had never done this before – such a

seemingly simple act that we took for granted, for her was so powerful. And this is the mystical beauty of St. Mary: the opportunity for God to speak to individuals in a way that only He knows how.

Our hope for next summer is to extend and expand the retreats to week-long adventures for at least three different groups of inner-city kids. If you are interested in sponsoring a child to enable them to experience the wonder and beauty of the Ontario wilderness and Saint Mary of Egypt Refuge, please contact Mary Marrocco. The cost per child, including food, transport and activities is \$500 for a week.

Lara Joannou, Children's and Youth Program Director,
St. John the Compassionate Mission
Board of Directors, St Mary of Egypt



Guest Retreat Leader

Sr Mary Ellen Francoeur, s.o.s., kindly gave us her time and presence to lead a retreat on the theme, "Healing Touch," with the guidance of Sts Cosmos and Damian. She also joined the exploring edition that crossed the river and discovered, among other treasures, Four-Cow Meadow and the Eastern Creek.

Quotation of the Season

"Is there a bathtub at the Refuge? What I'm really excited about is having a bath." Spoken by one of the guests from Margaret Frazer house on their December retreat at St Mary of Egypt, whose place of residence doesn't include a bathtub. (She got her nice long soaker bath.)





Planting Party

Guests on a November weekend planted 50 tulip bulbs, while chipmunks eyed the process with a little too much interest. Special thanks to Sharon Haxon, our Chief Cultivator, who has begun several garden beds and is making plans for a Wildlife Sanctuary. Watch for more in our next newsletter.



Thanksgiving

On Thanksgiving weekend, a group of twelve people or so waited in anticipation as the turkey roasted in the oven and the pies awaited forks digging into them. On that warm weekend, we had evening prayer in the "outdoor chapel"—site of the chapel to be built next spring. We spread a banquet table on the lawn in front of the house, and had no trouble feeling thankful. Special welcome went to Barbara and her son Stephen, who that weekend made their first visit to the Refuge. A glorious moment of Thanksgiving weekend: Stephen and Rocky frantically carrying water, in whatever vessels they could find, from the kitchen to the porch—where the pregnant fish they had caught was in danger after her bucket tipped over. To their relief, the garden hose was brought to bear and the fish returned to watery health. She was later taken back to the river.

First Annual Donors' Dinner

Thank you to all the many who sent us good wishes for the event. And to those who were able to be with us in person on October 30, get to know each other better, and celebrate all that's been achieved thus far. Special thanks to St John the Compassionate Mission which hosted us for dinner, and to Sean and Cindy and helpers who laid a sumptuous table. And to our guest speaker, Fr Bill Clarke, S.J., who spoke to us on the theme: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven." Here's an excerpt of his talk:

Bill Clarke, 30 October 2008 – Donors' Dinner Talk "Blessed are you poor"

Jesus said – when you prepare a feast, don't just welcome the successful, welcome the poor, the rejected, blind, lame. Come, my banquet is ready. They all had excuses – no time – that's the trouble with our riches, they tie us up and we don't have time to come to the feast. He sends for the poorest and they come. That's what happens in this very building – people come to be fed. That's the vision of Mary of Egypt – to welcome, to give a place where people can come and find peace and joy in a beautiful setting. The poor deserve that.

The poor have time – and they know their need for their brothers and sisters. "Blessed are *you* poor" is the title – that's all of us – we all are poor, we all are blessed. But sometimes we're frightened of that poverty within us, so we don't discover our blessedness. When people have external poverty, and can't defend themselves, then they often have a gift – tenderness – faithfulness – forgiveness. Those are the gifts I discovered at Guelph [Farm Community]. It wasn't obvious from the outside. Byron, a man of extraordinary violence, tried to kill himself. His rifle was too long, he had to hold his head up to get the gun under his chin. He only destroyed his face. Byron was a man of great violence and anger. But on another level, I discovered his gifts of tenderness, forgiveness, gentleness, under the exterior anger with which he protected his fragile heart.

The Scriptures speak of God as tenderness and fidelity. In Jesus are tenderness and fidelity incarnate. The most precious gift God has given us is our hearts of tenderness, fragility. Tragically, those with the greatest gifts we put to the margins rather than putting them at the heart of the community.

In every human there's a beautiful gift. God is hidden in the depths of our being. Let us not be afraid of being poor enough to discover it.



Site of Chapel—now due to be built
Spring 2009



Needs List

Volunteers: to help with hospitality

Outside: garden tools and supplies including shovels, hoes, rakes, wheelbarrow, earth, plants, shrubs, bushes, trees to help our garden, , pruning shears, swede saw, chainsaw, benches and park bench, you name it.

Boating Supplies: canoes or kayaks, lifejackets and rescue equipment.

Inside: good lamps and night tables, bedding (all sizes), pillows, and bed frames for a queen and double bed.

For the Children: arts and craft supplies; games; children's size chairs and table.

Hardware: household tools including roof ladder, step ladder, wrenches, mitre box, rasp, circular saw, clamps and large sledge hammer.

Manual labour, such as dry-walling the basement, building shelves, benches.

Other: water shoes.

Would you like to make a monthly pledge?

Send us the enclosed return slip, indicating the amount you would like to donate every month, along with a void cheque.

By making a monthly pledge, you become member of an unseen but strong community. Monthly pledges are the building-blocks on which the Refuge sits. Don't think your pledge is too small; don't worry about trying to give more than you really can. It's these regular, faithful, donations, of whatever size each of us can make, that allow everything else to happen.

**St. Mary of Egypt
Refuge**

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