

YONGE STREET MISSION



PRAYER
FOR THE
CITY

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DIGNITY:

We value people as unique individuals.

*But even the hairs of your head are all counted.
Do not be afraid; you are of more value than
many sparrows.*

Luke 12:7

People who live with poverty grow accustomed to experiencing humiliation and rejection in the course of their daily lives. Wherever they go in the public sphere, people make them wait, speak to them harshly, and generally make life difficult for them.

Most people living with poverty find it embarrassing and shameful. Often, they accept as true the myth that everyone has the capacity to succeed, if only they will work hard enough. As a result, people challenged with unemployment, inadequate food for the family, or lacking a decent place to live, believe that they have failed or done something wrong to bring about their difficult state.

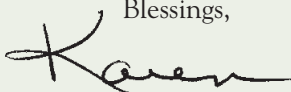
That is why Dignity is a core value at Yonge Street Mission. We treat everyone with whom we journey with as much dignity as we possibly can, regardless of their economic status, their mental health, or their addiction issues.

That's why we don't just hand people a bag of food in the Food Bank, but rather invite them to walk about the room selecting food items that their family will enjoy. That's why we have a gift certificate system for Double Take that enables people without means to choose clothing that fits them rather than simply handing them what might be available in a bin. That's why we offer meals that provide people with options, as much as we are able, and we serve them rather than forcing them to hold up a plate onto which we slop food. That's why our programming focuses on community development and empowerment instead of simply providing relief.

Dignity is something that is so easy to offer, yet often so rarely provided to people who live on the margins of society. When people are treated with dignity, they begin to recognize their own value, they find their voice and dare to speak for themselves.

As you read through this edition of Prayer for the City, please pray for all the members of our community, asking God to ensure that they are treated with dignity.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

*Prayer for the City is written by
Mission directors and staff.*

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6

The days grow shorter; the temperature drops, as do the once green leaves. As the seasons change, it is natural to reminisce.

While organizing old files and photos in the Daycare, it was hard not to be swept up in a wave of nostalgia. Stories came rushing back, bringing with them tears of laughter, joy, and sometimes sorrow.

The little boy fascinated with dinosaurs is now old enough to be heading to university. The little girl who insisted she was going to be a princess now has different dreams and aspirations. A teen that used to drop off his little brother is now dropping off his son. Some children we have seen mature into young adults, others just fall off the radar, causing us to wonder, “Whatever happened to...?”

As early childhood educators, we in the Daycare have the awesome responsibility of forming and shaping young lives and setting them on a path that we hope will lead to a bright future.

Pray for the children and families of our child care both past and present. Pray that the teaching and love that we provide will stay with them long after they leave our care. Pray for staff as they guide children through their most impressionable years and lay a foundation for the future.

It is a gift and privilege to serve in community because it provides an opportunity to engage with our neighbours on a regular basis and be part of their journey. However, it also presents a challenge – our attitude around giving and receiving.

Staff at YSM must see all who come our way as children of God. Our actions are not only about giving, but about receiving from God's children as well.

In St. James Town we are presented with this gift and challenge on a daily basis. It is our prayer and hope that each one who is sent our way is treated with dignity and respect.

We pray that we treat people as the cherished individuals that they are, not as numbers who need our services. It is our hope that we become the face of Christ to all who come through our door so that people in St. James Town are loved and treated for who they are, and not for what they have or don't have.

Dear Lord,

Help us to build community together with people as equals and as partners.

Help us to treat members of our community as gifts that we encounter to learn from and share our journey with.

Make us your good servants Lord, so that we serve your kingdom with humility and respect.
Amen.

A 30-year-old man named Kenny came to visit our Community Centre one day. He said, “You may not remember me, but I was one of Joey’s boys.”

Joey was the Youth Worker at Christian Community Centre during the mid-nineties. Joey wanted to reach out to some of the roughest youth in the neighbourhood. They had been barred from every other youth program in the city. Most had also been suspended from school and had been arrested more than once.

“Would you like to know what happened to us?” Kenny asked. He then listed off seven different names from the old Youth Group. Two were in the trades, one was in finance and four were in various branches of social work. All had continued past high school in their education. He himself has been steadily employed for eight years as a caseworker with a non-profit agency.

There is no way we can take all the credit for these young men turning their lives around. There are so many other factors involved. We were simply open on Friday nights, keeping relationships going. Maybe that is all it took to make a difference.

Pray that we may never forget that every tough kid, every hopeless case and every ‘waste of time’ is a child of God, deserving of dignity and capable of transformation. Thanks be to God!

My friends, you know that our time with you wasn't wasted.

1 Thessalonians 2: 1

The Christmas season has just begun and it brings such a mixture of emotions. As Christians we celebrate this time of year because it reminds us that God is with us. In the midst of our brokenness, God still chose to be 'present'. He chose not to abandon His creation. For some this season is truly filled with family, hope, joy, and laughter. For others it is a time of loneliness, sadness, confusion, and even despair.

At Evergreen the youth we serve often experience the sad and lonely side of Christmas. One year a young single mom found out on Christmas Eve that Children's Aid were apprehending her children. While so many others were having pleasant Christmas dinners with their families (or even spent the day complaining about the family they do have) this mom sat in our Drop In and cried and cried and cried.

Please pray for the youth at Evergreen – pray that they will know God's peace and His comfort. Please pray for the staff – this time of year can be extremely draining.

Pray that now more than ever staff will be an example of God's presence.

Please pray that the youth at Evergreen will know that God has not abandoned them and that He loves each one as His own child.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19: 10

‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’

This we are all commanded to do, but in an environment like our Genesis Place apartment building, we find many conflicts arise amongst neighbours. Sometimes a complaint about noise from a neighbouring unit escalates into an argument and hurtful personal insults. Sometimes there are previous hurts that have never been acknowledged that suddenly rise to the surface.

The gift of listening is one of the major keys to eliminating conflict. By truly listening to the other person, tenants can attain the peace that is required to live as a good neighbour. At Genesis Place we work with our tenants to build skills like listening. For most tenants, GP housing is transitional and they need to develop good life skills in order to move on to other types of housing without the same level of support.

To build community, whether at GP or outside it, people need to be good neighbours.

Pray that tenants and staff at Genesis Place will create a community where neighbours listen to one another and strive for peace and love.

Pray that tenants who move on will create community in their new homes and help to better our whole city.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself.

Leviticus 19: 18

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:20

Christmas can be a very difficult time for people who don't have a lot of resources, either materially or relationally. Christmas is supposed to be about celebrating the good news, but when there isn't enough money for food or toys for the children, it makes celebrating very difficult.

Through amazing donations of food and toys, we have been able to provide some of the material needs of Christmas for our community.

Celebrating can also be difficult when many of our community members don't have others to celebrate with – they are new to this country, or they have experienced loss of relationships through death or through conflict.

Last year we provided more opportunities to celebrate with the community throughout December right up to Christmas Eve. Community members came together at various times in the month to celebrate through caroling, good meals, making Christmas decorations, putting on a pageant and creating memories.

Children, adults and seniors were so happy that they were able to share in celebrating Christmas with their friends from YSM. One of the community members said that this was their best Christmas ever, because they were able to celebrate it with their community. They felt like they had really experienced the good news of Christmas.

Pray that throughout this Christmas season our community will be able to celebrate the Good News that Jesus came to bring.

It was a busy afternoon, just a few days before Christmas. Evergreen Health Centre was crowded with street youth and noisy babies. Rob pushed his way through to the nurse and quietly whispered, “I need some ointment.” His entire forearm was covered in long jagged cuts from wrist to elbow. Etched along one side were large bleeding letters that spelled “HELP”.

We had known this young man for six months. He had just become a new father but a quarrel arose between him and his daughter’s mother resulting in the loss of his new home, his girlfriend and his baby. In his despair, he carved that message: pain on his arm was simply easier to bear than pain in his heart. A few days later he was in a coma in hospital after an unsuccessful attempt to end his life.

We thought of other parents who had lost their babies at Christmas time:

“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem...

*A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”*

Matthew 2:16,18

This Christmas, pray for young people like Rob who suffer. Many have stories that are too close to those of the mothers of Bethlehem. Pray for their comfort and release.

Aurelio didn't have his trademark smile one morning when he visited our Food Bank. Usually when he came to get food for his young wife and their cute baby, volunteers and staff anticipated a great moment of laughter.

This time his warm heart was crushed by news that in Mozambique, his country of origin, food riots had sent the whole nation into turmoil. The prices of bread, water and electricity skyrocketed overnight and Mozambicans discovered that feeding their families was a luxury they couldn't afford.

Unable to do anything to help his loved ones, Aurelio felt burdened by worry, fear, despair and even righteous anger. His home country has historically been a self-sufficient nation when it comes to food production and distribution.

However, over the last two decades, most of the food produced in Mozambique (and Ethiopia, and many other poor countries) is earmarked for the international market and shipped abroad, away from the table of local farmers.

Stories like Aurelio's are not that uncommon in our Community Centre. But people whose dignity has been snatched away start to reclaim their sense of worth as they gather at YSM with other community members, volunteers, and staff. We cannot undo the injustice that is sweeping the food away from the fields of millions of Aurelios. And yet, what we see is that their smiles can come back to light up their faces.

We have celebrated the birth of Jesus, God's gift to the world. Let us pray that in the New Year ahead, God's smile will prevail over the pain and sorrow that afflict our city and the world.

We remember the hard work of volunteers this winter and especially note that they come through rain, cold, snow, wind and ice. Nothing holds them back from their commitment to touch lives and help effect lasting change.

Each year YSM welcomes over 3000 volunteers in almost all areas of our ministry: programs, administration and special events. Each is unique and each shares their gifts. Volunteers help to emulate and reflect YSM's core values. These integral parts of our team perform their work with dignity and grace as they engage our community members, care for YSM, help out wherever needed, and make a real difference.

Dignity is the core value we focus on this season and with dignity we honour and value our many volunteers, bless their commitment, time and talents and thank God for each and every one; they are part of the Body.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed the body does not consist of one member, but of many. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

I Corinthians 12: 12-14, 27

We sometimes overlook the smaller things in life.

The day to day work at YSM brings stories of children, youth or adult community members whose lives have been transformed in huge ways. Sometimes we get so caught up in wanting these big changes in the community that we don't see the joy in the small things.

Simple things, like a pre-school child in the computer lab yelling, "I did it!" when she correctly presses the "B" key and a growling bear romps onto the screen. Or a quiet and reserved Grade 5 student laughing uncontrollably after tipping a canoe at overnight camp.

A small moment can arise when a shy Muslim woman, who can barely speak any words in English, gives the counsellor a huge embrace after her children have finished four weeks of summer camp. A small moment can arise when a 45-year-old man receives a certificate upon completion of a basic computer course, holds it up and stares at it with pride.

God works in big ways and small ways, but the important thing to keep in mind each day, is that God works – and we need to be grateful for these moments, both big and small.

God does great things, and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.

Job 5: 9

One of our programs at Evergreen is a pre-employment development program for street youth called 'Next Step'.

It seems self-explanatory as a name for an employment program: take the next step to improve your chances of getting a job.

That's it, four mornings a week for five weeks. Sounds simple?

Maybe for one who is used to a normal lifestyle.

But what exactly defines 'normal'?

For the youth who take the Next Step program, the stark reality of hunger and marginalized living make 'normal' seem insignificant. Many are living lives that do not fit society's definition of normal.

During the five weeks, the group members become part of one another's experiential worlds and grow together to achieve a new learned behaviour, expressed by mutual dignity and respect for each other's lives and circumstances. Dignity is given and received.

God grant us the grace to look past normality at individual images of You, and treat each other with the dignity needed to be able to take the next step.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Luke 6: 37

JANUARY 24 – 30

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Luke 10:29

The neighbours God calls us to serve are often people we don't know by name. Some of our neighbours are the people we share this wonderful city with, people who may need a helping hand.

Each year at the end of January, if you walk along the PATH underground walkway in downtown Toronto, you will find Torontonians enthusiastically serving their neighbours through the YSM Clothing Drive.

People who live or work in the downtown core are helping their neighbours who reside in Regent Park and the surrounding area. Volunteers hear countless times how thankful folks are for a trustworthy way to donate back to the community, all the while cleaning out their closets.

Clothing Drive donations provide good quality clothing that our Double Take store sells at affordable prices. Most importantly the neediest of our community can shop for clothing with gift certificates obtained from YSM program staff. Donors to the Clothing Drive are helping their neighbours in need and allowing them to preserve their dignity.

We give thanks and praise for the generosity of donors, for the people who give to their unknown neighbours and for the many volunteers who make the giving possible. Please pray for the health and safety of YSM staff and volunteers and for connections made with donors, that they may know our gratitude.

JAN. 31 – FEB. 6

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28: 18-20

Love gives. Love welcomes. Love embraces and love reaches out. We serve the God whom the Bible, the Word of God, calls “Love”. God calls us to go out from where we feel safe, out from where everything is familiar and easy. God calls us, and Jesus calls us, out to the streets, out into our communities. He calls us out into the margins of society and out into the highways and by-ways of our world.

Please pray for the people of Church at the Mission as we more deeply and actively embrace “getting out there” and being lights in our community and as we share our lives more transparently.

Pray for us as we actively reach out and invite people to join us at church and at CATM Academy, and as we seek to be a tangible expression of the love of God and of God’s Kingdom in our neighbourhood.



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