

URBAN LIGHTS



A LEGACY OF GRACE & GOODNESS

In 1983 Rick was living in his beloved Atlantic Canada, with no intention of leaving. Yet, because of YSM's persistent leadership, Rick agreed to move to Toronto and join the team as Director of the Evergreen Centre. Just two years later, Rick began to re-focus Evergreen to address the needs of the street-involved youth he encountered who spent their nights sleeping in Evergreen's entry-way. The youth longed for community, a sense of family and a church where they would feel connected and cared for. So, in 1987, Rick began working with local churches, resulting in establishment of Church on the Street, now known as our Church at the Mission.

Rick's innovative work led to him being invited to become YSM's CEO in 1989, a position he held for 24 years. In that role Rick led the charge to raise funds, develop YSM's property and start many of our staple programs. Under his guidance, YSM saw the creation of the Evergreen Health Centre, the original iteration of our Community Development team, and the evolution of our 310 Centre to launch YSM's Double Take thrift store and Computer Centre. Rick's team redeveloped The Davis Centre and raised funds to purchase and develop our current administrative centre, The Martin Centre, to act as a community meeting, management and educational centre. Rick also developed the first Evergreen employment program, *Hal's Coffee and Muffin Shop*, where youth could gain valuable skills.

In 2013 Rick stepped down as CEO, to become YSM's Community Advocate. In addition to teaching at Tyndale Seminary, Rick continued to represent YSM by speaking publicly on topics such as poverty in Canada, urban ministry, at-risk youth and strategies for community-wide change.

Throughout his time as CEO of YSM, Rick poured his heart into his work, witnessing YSM grow from 50 to about 120 staff while responding to huge shifts in needs among the community. During his tenure, YSM embraced an internal culture shift, focusing on a more inclusive, barrier-free mission to ensure anyone needing services felt like this was a place where they belonged. For those who may have been fearful to enter a Christian mission, this culture shift meant a greater diversity in staff, who modeled their values and faith through action and compassion. These shifts catered to all the needs of the individuals seeking help, and were the foundation of YSM's wrap-around care model.

Rick requested that any retirement celebration in his honour should positively impact YSM. To fulfill that vision we created an endowment fund – **The Grace and Goodness Trust** – to underwrite YSM's annual operating expenses.

➤ For more information about *The Grace & Goodness Trust*, visit ysm.ca/grace-goodness, or contact Angela Solomos at 416-355-3549 or asolomos@ysm.ca.

Rick, for all you have done at YSM, and all you continue to do to help those around you, we truly thank you.

A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER



 *To learn more or to get involved with the Toy Market, please visit ysm.ca/toy-market.*

Every year, as the temperature drops and leaves begin to fall, community members, volunteers, donors and staff eagerly anticipate our annual Toy Market. It presents an opportunity for families to obtain high quality, meaningful gifts for their children and is a source of joy for all who encounter it! Thanks to an innovative new approach, our 16th annual Toy Market will continue to bring happiness to our community.

This year's Toy Market is moving online, with the assistance of an app, Geenees, which supports both donors and community members through a simple interface. It enables YSM to create a custom wish list, and allows donors to easily and directly shop through the platform and donate wished for gifts to our Toy Market with the click of a button. Community families "shop" online, through the lists of donated toys, to find just the right gifts for their children. YSM volunteers pack toys into boxes and, beginning Dec 14th, families will pick up their gifts.

"[My kids] thought it couldn't be real," said Hana, a mother of four who has received gifts from YSM's Toy Market for her family, "They brought them into their bedrooms - took an hour to open each gift and play with it. They asked me to take a picture of them with their toys so they could remember this moment for all time."

Thank you for your kind support to offer families in need the opportunity to experience a Christmas to remember.

Sharon first interacted with YSM through fabric shopping at our Double Take thrift store while teaching teen girls in Regent Park sewing and how to create up-cycled crafts. Frequent return trips connected her with Kathy, Double Take's then Manager, who commissioned Sharon to create a wall hanging for the store.

A few years later, Sharon started working at YSM's Evergreen Centre, leveraging her creative skills to benefit the street-involved youth being served there. As of this summer, Sharon has now stepped into the role of Double Take's Store Manager.

After getting settled, her priority this fall has been working with store staff to find safe ways for the store to re-open and continue serving the community. As new protocols start to feel routine, Sharon and her team are now looking forward to identifying new opportunities.

"I'm excited to support all YSM programs - to help them make the most of having a thrift store as part of YSM. I'm also looking forward to integrating our training opportunities into the store, to optimize the benefit for our community members." Sharon talks further about some new initiatives for the store, including sustainability projects, "Especially now that so many kids are home with their parents, we want to create zero-waste product offerings, like craft kits for families to make together from donations that may not be otherwise usable, such as sweaters which shrunk in the wash."

SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION



Sharon stands in the entrance of Double Take in front of the wall hanging she made.

 *Double Take has started a YouTube channel. To get involved or learn some new crafting skills visit ysm.ca/double-take.*

POWER OF A HUG

Evergreen Centre had just opened its doors for another day of providing essential supports and services to street-involved youth, when an unexpected visitor arrived. A large man, clearly agitated, began aggressively banging on the doors of the centre demanding food. Although he was older than youth served at Evergreen, YSM drop-in staff member Dwight couldn't ignore his need and, hoping to alleviate his concerns and help him calm down, Dwight stepped outside to talk to him.

Dwight quickly realized the visitor was suffering from severe mental health issues. As Dwight began speaking to him, asking him to step back to maintain social distance, the man got very close, yelling and spitting in Dwight's face. As Dwight backed away, the man roughly shoved Dwight and made a false claim to have a weapon.

Dwight was afraid and shaken from this interaction. Though he had been wearing a cloth mask, he hadn't had time to put on his face shield. So Dwight stepped inside to wash his face, take a breath and pray.

Minutes later, Dwight was back outside, wearing a mask and face shield and carrying a take-away meal.

"I approached him with the bag of food and told him it was okay," said Dwight. "I gave him the food he needed and that's when I realized love and forgiveness have true power. He was a mental health patient and his appearance was deceiving.



An image captured from our security camera shows Dwight taking food to man outside the Evergreen Centre.

"I put my arms around him, embraced him, and he began to cry. I told him it was okay, that we loved him and that I forgave him for spitting at me and pushing me. He started to weaken and cry as I embraced him.

"This embrace was life changing for me. In the political climate we are in, I hope the world will know that forgiveness and love hold true power."

 *To learn more about YSM's Evergreen Centre visit ysm.ca/evergreen*

JOIN US - YOUR SUPPORT IN ACTION

■ Our **Coldest Night of the Year** event will be a COVID-safe, family-friendly walk to raise money to support neighbours struggling with poverty through the winter months. You can walk 2km or 5km virtually or in-person. There's a place for everyone. Join us February 20, 2021. It's cold out there - walk with us! Learn more at ysm.ca/cnoy

■ **Paying Tribute:** This Christmas, make a difference in the lives of struggling neighbours by making a special gift in honour of a loved one, friend, colleagues or clients. Each will be notified of your kindness with a festive card including your personal message. Call us at (416) 929-9614 or visit give.ysm.ca/inhonour to make your tribute donation today.

■ **Cold Weather Community Needs:** YSM is in need of warm clothing, hats, gloves, hand-warmers, sleeping bags and tents to help protect our neighbours from the extreme cold.

We are also in need of hygiene items, such as adult diapers, individual hand sanitizer, shampoo, deodorant, soap, razors, moisturizing cream, lip balm, new underwear and socks, tooth brushes and toothpaste, to give out to those seeking help.

Donations can be dropped off at 306 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON M5A 2G7 or call (416) 929 9614 for more information.

ANOTHER HISTORIC MOMENT OF . . . GENEROSITY AND GRACE

I have turned into a history buff. The impact of this pandemic as YSM enters its 125th year of service in Toronto has caused me to look back at the history of our city and of YSM. There is much to learn.

The first lesson is of humility and the second is a clear recognition of our roles as servants who follow in the footsteps of decades of giants.

To the point of humility, another historic event occurred this fall. Many guests gathered virtually to celebrate the retirement of the incredibly accomplished and humble Dr. Rick Tobias, who served at YSM for 37 years, including 24 as our CEO. It was a wonderful time remembering the significant achievements of YSM under Rick's visionary and capable leadership. In the overwhelming volume of notes and messages, there was a common theme of appreciation of Rick's great heart for people, his thoughtful leadership, and his extraordinary capacity for friendship.

In one of those notes Rick and I received a wonderful artistic rendering of the two of us, side by side on the screen, drawn by Teddy, age 5, the son of a long-time friend of Rick's. I rather like this hand drawn image of us as a reminder of this significant event: Rick with his beard and me with my apparent uni-brow, I may even frame it! It captures the whimsy and joy of what continues to be a most significant relationship of friendship and support in my life and leadership.

To the second lesson - a history of servanthood - the pictures from the early 1900s of people standing outside our historic property on Yonge Street waiting for food look eerily similar to the long line ups we have today as we seek to meet the growing need for food, mental health, employment and housing supports.

We've been focused on developing a sustainable food security plan for the Downtown East with colleagues from the city, Daily Bread Food Bank, and the other food banks in our area. We've developed a "cold-weather" plan to offer appointments and ensure no one



Rick and Angie drawn by Teddy Whitewater, aged 5

will have to wait outside in a long, cold line up. We also seek to have another food bank in the Downtown East, established for at least a two year period, to help meet the growing need.

In 2020, YSM looks a lot like we did in 1914, facing a massive societal challenge shoulder to shoulder with you and with our community.

In 1914, John Coolidge Davis and his team of staff, volunteers and donors were serving those in dire need. Many leaders and teams have capably risen to the challenge of each era, and Rick Tobias truly stood as a giant among them, as he shepherded a season of growth and shaped how we all think about poverty and the people who experience it.

On behalf of our past and present teams, there are truly no adequate words to express our gratitude to donors for your choice to serve with us in this season, through your increased generosity. I think there is a historic crowd encouraging us onward as together we offer Christmas gifts, a warm coat, a bag of groceries and a compassionate hug at the moment when it's needed most.

Blessings,



Thank you! Your support makes all of YSM's important programs possible.

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