

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

JAN ROTHENBURGER: THE PEOPLE'S PASTOR

By Reverend Matthew Parker



Reverend Jan Rothenburger served
30+ years at YSM

In 1991, after recently coming to faith, Jan Rothenburger found herself at a unique church service at YSM's Evergreen Centre. The church served as a safe space for community members to call 'home', especially those not comfortable in other faith communities.

Jan attended Evergreen's services weekly, while connecting with street-involved youth and women, some of whom attended the church and other Evergreen programs. That began her 30-plus-year journey of loving and caring for community members often forgotten by our society, living on the fringes.

Jan volunteered as part of Evergreen's summer team. Then in 1996, she was hired as YSM's church community

outreach pastor, to support struggling community members. It was the beginning of Jan's three-decades-long YSM ministry as a pastor, street ministry worker, prison chaplain and confidant for hundreds of youth and women.

In her time with us, Jan supported many community members through the prison system, instilling in them a sense of hope and a vision for their lives beyond mere survival. She humbly viewed herself as being inherently the same as the neighbours she served, journeying alongside them as they overcame barriers.

When YSM focused its mandate on ending chronic poverty in a generation, we needed a fresh approach to engaging adults living in poverty. Jan developed what was to become YSM's Bridges program, offering care management and self-development courses to prepare community members for employment, and ultimately to better their lives.

On December 31, 2022, Reverend Jan officially retired from her role as YSM Care Manager. We sincerely thank her for her gracious decades of service. To our great joy and delight, Jan will continue on as a volunteer Community Pastor Emeritus at our Church at the Mission, where she will work with the pastoral team to provide our community with the best possible long-term spiritual and practical care.

Bridges' drop-In reunites community

With the COVID-19 pandemic, YSM's Bridges' programming temporarily shifted its in-person dinners and courses to take-away meals and online learning. For two years, our adult community members were without regular in-person meetings and connections, which negatively impacted many.

Once provincial safety restrictions loosened in spring 2022, Bridges again began hosting weekly Tuesday drop-in sessions, offering support. According to Reverend Jan, drop-in fulfilled various needs: a crisis centre to support community members; a music jam, where visitors could sing and play instruments; an art studio fostering creativity and a hair salon where a volunteer hairstylist provided free haircuts for community members.

YSM sincerely thanks our generous donors who enable Bridges to provide a place of fellowship, care, counsel and creativity for adults in need of community.



Christmas spirit at YSM!



Volunteers from ReSource Group Canada happily worked to offer Christmas joy to neighbourhood families served by YSM's Toy Market

Christmas can be a magical joyful season filled with surprises, celebration and community.

Thanks to the generous care and support of our donors and partners, our Toy Market, held annually in December, provides new toys to families of YSM's Cornerstone Family Services.

Our 2022 Toy Market proved to be a notable success, with YSM providing gifts valued at over \$150,000 to a total of 956 children from 443 families, a considerable increase over Toy Market 2021 when we served 862 children from 391 families.

As usual, volunteers were an integral part of the successful market. They contributed a total 596 hours to help us organize and inventory toys, decorate, schedule toy pick-ups, provide shopping assistance, staff visitor check in, and most notably, warmly greet and serve community members in an effort to

provide a joyful community-building experience.

We are also incredibly grateful for all organizations which donated, volunteered their time, or organized toy drives on YSM's behalf, including Allied Properties REIT, C3 Church, Calvary Church, Cintex International – which donated 700 skateboards, 200 mini hockey sets and assorted clothing items, HBC Fairview, Hillsong Church, Orange Theory Fitness (University Ave. location), Putnam Investments, ReSource Group Canada, SimCorp, Spinmaster Toys, Tyndale University and Vigorate, in addition to others.

We are truly grateful to all our donors, partners and volunteers, who enabled YSM to offer the families we serve the best of Christmas and the season of giving. Thank you!

Our donors delivered a Christmas miracle!

By Reverend Jan Rothenburger

A few days after our Toy Market ended, I received a frantic call from a woman named Tanya* who I'd helped in the past. She told me her daughter had dropped off her three children a week ago and hadn't yet returned to pick them up or care for them.

With Christmas only a week away, she was concerned she wouldn't be able to offer them any presents because of her financial constraints. She had been praying for help. After hearing from her, I reached out to our incredible Volunteer Resources team who organize Toy Market to see if they could help.



Fortunately, there was a variety of remaining toys due to the astounding number of donations received. Items were selected to suit the ages and interests of each of Tanya's grandchildren, and I was able to deliver the toys to her, just before Christmas. When I handed her the bags, she was overwhelmed with emotion. "God heard my prayers," she said, as tears ran down her joyful face.

Thank you to all our wonderful donors who make special moments like this possible. We are so grateful, as are the community members we serve.

**Name changed to respect community member's privacy.*

MEET RENALDO WALL, DIRECTOR OF STREET- INVOLVED SERVICES



Renaldo is a proud father of two children

Back in the summer of 2022, Renaldo had been feeling it was time for a career change. He had been praying that he'd realize such a change when a friend sent him a YSM job posting seeking a Director of Street-Involved Services.

The role required an established leader who would help advance the many programs and services at our YSM Evergreen Centre for Street-Involved Youth, including drop-in, food services, Health Centre, employment and workforce development as well as the HOPE - Helping Offenders on Probation Excel - program.

Unbeknownst to Renaldo, YSM staff had also been praying for several months to find the right candidate for the position. Based on his extensive experience as Director of Children and Youth Ministries at Scott Mission, and as Director of Community Services at Fern Youth Services, he felt confident he could succeed in the role and soon applied.

In October 2022, Renaldo officially joined the YSM family and we couldn't be happier! Although Renaldo had long been familiar with Yonge Street Mission, he would only learn about the full scope of our programs and partnerships during his onboarding. He found his learnings deeply encouraging, to say the least.

"It's a one-stop shop for anyone who's in need," Renaldo said. "And so I think that's really kind of opened my eyes to a lot of the possibilities of how we can actually help to be an answer to chronic poverty."

Renaldo was immediately struck by the "high level of acceptance" at YSM, which he said isn't always the case at faith-based organizations.

"Anybody who walks through the doors will be served and treated with dignity, respect, and quality service," he said. "There's no judgment or discrimination. There's just constant compassion and support."

Renaldo has a strong vision for Evergreen which he and his team hope to achieve through three ambitious goals.

First, he would like Evergreen to expand its outreach efforts to ensure more youth are able to access the space and its myriad of services. Secondly, he wants to ensure YSM guides all youth who come to Evergreen through a transformational journey via different programs and support. Thirdly, he would like Evergreen to ultimately increase its advocacy efforts.

"A lot of the youth with whom we work need a voice and they sometimes don't feel like they have one," Renaldo said. "The ability to advocate on their behalf, to see systemic change, could benefit them."

Thinking Forward: YSM's new anti-bullying initiative

Bullying has become a major social issue. The statistics are alarming, and numerous studies have shown how bullying carries long-term harmful impacts – both for the child being bullied and the child doing the bullying.

YSM recently acquired *Thinking Forward*, an innovative curriculum designed to build character, promote leadership and reduce bullying in Toronto schools. We are honoured to lead this amazing initiative's growth and expansion through our Cornerstone Family Services.

Thinking Forward works towards a singular goal of decreasing the incidence of bullying by developing strong character and leadership abilities in children and youth, aged 6-18, at Toronto inner-city schools.

But rather than provide resources, how-tos and information about bullying at school assemblies, *Thinking Forward* works proactively by holding 1-3 hour interactive, arts-based lessons and activities in classrooms over a 4-week educational program. Ultimately, we believe these programs will channel energy into creating positive change in their communities.



Through *Thinking Forward*, Toronto students created anti-bullying artwork

ANGELA'S LETTER



I am honoured to be the guest contributor of "The Back Page" for this issue of Urban Lights. Our President & CEO, Angie Peters, offered me this opportunity so I can share my gratitude for the outstanding outpouring of support we saw from you, our donors, partners and friends, this past Christmas.

During a season when much was changing around us – from the departure of our beloved long-serving staff member Rev. Jan Rothenburger to the arrival of our newest staff leader Renaldo Wall – it was reassuring to see the steadfast commitment of our supporters as we adapted and evolved throughout these significant changes.

Serving during these past three years of the pandemic taught us the importance of evolving in the midst of change. In this issue, you'll read about our Toy Market, the first market without the COVID-19 public health restrictions which had limited our ability to meaningfully and directly connect with our community during the Market. You'll also read about our Bridges' drop-in program returning to its original in-person model and about *Thinking Forward*, a newly launched program through our Cornerstone Family Services, aimed at delivering

an innovative anti-bullying and character-building program in our city's schools.

When the pandemic started we feared the changes forced upon us all. Living through such an unusual time has been a reminder of the importance of adaptability and change and the vital need for community and connection.

In our 127 years of service, YSM has certainly become intimately acquainted with those elements. As they say, change is the one constant, and over our many years spent serving neighbours, we have borne witness to the many evolving aspects of our city.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said, "It is in changing that we find purpose". At YSM we are grateful for changes that have caused us to pause and consider how to evolve and adapt to do an even better job of serving our most vulnerable neighbours, and to do so with a renewed sense of purpose and calling.

May the changes you read about in this issue of Urban Lights renew your sense of hope and optimism for the year ahead, and as you place your faith in us to serve Toronto neighbours who are experiencing the lingering effects of the pandemic and so many changes in the world around us. Much work remains to be done, and we are so grateful to have you alongside us.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Angie'.

Health Care volunteers needed!



A volunteer dentist at Evergreen's Health Centre

YSM is seeking volunteer medical professionals to join our Evergreen Health Centre & Dental Clinic team, including dentists, chiropractors, psychiatrists, physiotherapists, registered massage therapists, optometrists, family physicians and nurse practitioners.

By partnering with licensed volunteer health care professionals, our Evergreen Health Centre & Dental Clinic is able to provide low-barrier access to compassionate and non-judgmental health services for and street-involved youth, aged 16-24, and their children.

These services include foot care, STI testing, chiropractic adjustments, acupuncture, and regular medical and dental care.

If you are a licensed health care provider who is seeking a rewarding volunteer experience and an opportunity to use your skills in the community, consider joining our Evergreen Health Centre team of committed health care volunteers!

The time commitment is 4 hours, once a month, for a minimum of 6 months. For more information, email healthcentre@ysm.ca or visit ysm.ca/healthcareproviders.