

URBAN LIGHTS

TRANSFORMING TORONTO SINCE 1896

Join our First-Ever YSM Winter Walk . . . Introducing the inaugural walk for Neighbours in Need!



Join our first ever YSM Winter Walk, on **Saturday, February 10, 2024**, for family-friendly fun!

As winter takes hold of Toronto and the GTA, we're rallying our caring community for the inaugural **YSM Winter Walk for Neighbours in Need**.

For the past 13 years, we have walked together in Coldest Night of the Year. This year, when demand for relief and supportive services is at an all-time high, **YSM is organizing its own fundraising walk event, to ensure every dollar raised will go directly to programs and services to benefit those we serve.**

YSM envisions breaking the cycle of generational poverty. To make this vision real, we are calling on our donors, partners, volunteers, and supporters to join us on **February 10, 2024**, for our first **YSM Winter Walk for Neighbours in Need**.

This isn't just a walk; it's a family-friendly 2 or 5 km winter fundraising walk event, supporting street-involved youth, families in need, and adults experiencing long-term poverty.

YSM has been a lifeline for Toronto neighbours in need for 127 years, and this event will help us to continue to serve in that capacity. Our goal is simple yet potent: raise \$180,000 to aid so many community members who are experiencing poverty and hardship.

As use of YSM's Food Bank recently increased by 247%, in just one year, food insecurity in our city is reaching crisis levels, with nearly half a million Toronto residents experiencing hardship.

Will you be part of the solution? Register to walk in the **YSM Winter Walk** fundraiser, to make a profound difference in neighbours' lives.

Mark February 10, 2024 on your calendar, to walk 2 or 5 km or volunteer if you prefer. Participants of all ages and fitness levels are welcome! Together, we can eliminate generational poverty in our city.

Learn more at ysm.ca/winterwalk/. This can be your opportunity to bring warmth and a brighter future to Toronto neighbours in need.

A Church at the Mission Christmas

Yonge Street Mission is guided by a vision of hope, resilience, and community connections. This holiday season, we invite all to celebrate Christmas with us!

Church at the Mission (CATM) is preparing for December services, with plans to offer reflections on hope, peace, joy, and love. CATM will bring together YSM community members of all ages, reminding them they're not alone, and offering a place of kinship and hope.

As Christmas approaches, CATM and YSM's Bridges' Community Support Services host a special holiday dinner, emphasizing community and unity. Details will be forthcoming and our commitment to being available to offer support to CATM parishioners and friends – especially as the holidays can be a challenging time for many – remains unwavering.

CATM will offer a special Christmas eve service filled with reflection and gratitude, as the cornerstone of our Christmas celebrations. We extend a warm welcome to all. Learn more about Church at the Mission at linktr.ee/churchatthemission.



Our CATM team will offer special services and festivities.



Parents browse the Toy Market to ensure special holiday surprises for their kids.

Bringing Joy to Regent Park: YSM's 2023 Toy Market

A heartwarming example of generosity, hope and Christmas spirit unfolds at Yonge Street Mission's annual Toy Market.

This beloved annual event provides holiday gifts to over 450 Regent Park families, creating unforgettable memories for more than 950 children who deserve a holiday from hardship.

To understand the impact of donated toys, consider these examples of families supported in 2022:

One community member's experience deeply touched the hearts of our staff and volunteers: A mother took considerable time to carefully choose gifts for her children, spending an hour, far beyond the typical 15-20 minute assigned time slot. Volunteers' patience and genuine kindness moved her, reminding all present that YSM offers more than just a toy market, it's also a source of love and support!

One grandmother's story illustrates the unexpected blessings that can emerge from our Toy Market. Unexpectedly, her grandchildren were dropped off for her to care for, because of her daughter's

challenges with addiction. Very close to Christmas, thanks to the attention of YSM's now retired Pastor Jan, she received a specially selected collection of age-appropriate toys with which to surprise her grandkids. Given the late stage when the toys were delivered, she was overcome with relief and gratitude!

Similarly, an overwhelmed parent, with a car loaded with toys from the market, expressed sincere gratitude, declaring, "This is Christmas!" knowing the abundant gifts would light up the faces of their family's children. With YSM's support, the family was freed from financial pressure and worry, to instead feel holiday joy.

These stories vividly illustrate the impact of YSM's Toy Market on so many families in need. With your help, more unforgettable moments will soon be created, to make this holiday season truly special for as many as possible. **Please join in spreading joy among Regent Park families!** Learn more at ysm.ca/toy-market/.

Give Hope with E-Transfer Donations!

Simplify supporting YSM's vital work by donating via Interac e-transfers – they're quick, secure, and can maximize your contribution's direct impact by eliminating processing fees.

Why donate via e-transfer:

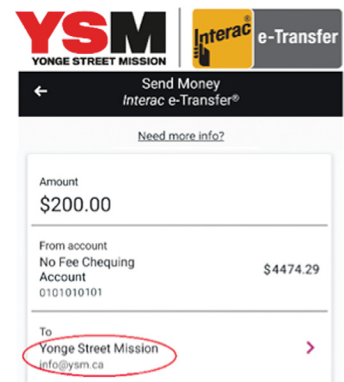
- **Secure & Accessible:** Available 24/7, e-transfers are as secure as online banking.
- **Maximize Impact:** Minimize processing fees, ensuring your entire donation will be put toward services for those in need.

To donate via e-transfer, follow instructions on our website at ysm.ca/get-involved/ways-to-give/, "E-Transfer Donations."

Straightforward and impactful, e-transfer giving can help create a brighter future for those YSM serves.

Join us in transforming lives and building community through your e-transfer donation today!

Thank you for being a beacon of hope in our community!



Giving by Interac e-transfer eliminates fees, so more of your donation can benefit struggling neighbours.

Meet a valuable new member of YSM's leadership team!



Charles Ivenso, Director of Finance, and a new addition to the YSM staff family.

Charles Ivenso's remarkable journey began with his pivotal role in supporting the transformation of the Lagos Business School into a globally recognized institution, one ranked among the world's top business schools by the Financial Times of London.

With two decades of unwavering commitment to the Lagos Business School, he sought a new challenge, one that he and his family would embark on together.

Canada became the new horizon for Charles and his family, and it was here he discovered Yonge Street Mission. What drew him to our organization were

YSM's mission, vision, and values, all of which resonate with his own beliefs.

As a Chartered Accountant with a wealth of global experience in financial management and control, Charles's expertise is an invaluable asset to YSM. He made a courageous leap to come to Canada with his wife and four children, who range in age from 11 to 20 years old.

Charles's willingness to embrace change, his adventurous spirit, and his determination to adapt to a new country and culture led him to YSM. Via his journey, Charles and his family are planting new roots and are also contributing to the success of our mission.

With Charles at the helm of our Finance team, we're inspired by his story and the passion he brings to our shared mission. Join us in welcoming him to the YSM family as we continue to make a difference in our community. *Welcome, Charles!*

Embracing the Spirit of Christmas: Latin American and Hispanic Cultural Traditions

At Yonge Street Mission, we cherish diversity. Recently we celebrated the contributions of Latin American and Hispanic members of our staff family, in observation of Latin American and Hispanic Heritage month in October.

During this special season, we wanted to explore vibrant related cultural traditions that fill the holiday season with warmth, unity, and Christmas spirit.

In Latin American and Hispanic cultures, Christmas Eve is a time of gathering with extended family. Families come together to share the nativity story, and wait until midnight to open their gifts. This tradition brims with love and wonder, emphasizing the joy of giving.

In Colombia, the festivities continue late into the night with music, dancing, and Spanish melodies, lasting until the early

hours, amid an expression of seemingly boundless energy and love!

Colombian traditions also include the "novenas," starting a few days before Christmas, when families read the nativity story, sing Colombian and Spanish carols, and savour traditional Colombian Christmas foods like natilla and buñuelos.

The Novena, from December 16th to the 24th, are the days leading up to Christmas. It's a time when families gather and reflect on the true meaning of the season, emphasizing the importance of family and faith.

The Day of the Little Candles is on December 8th. Candles are lit on streets, windowsills, and balconies and, in the Caribbean, this tradition begins at dawn, with neighbours coming together to share sandwiches and hot chocolate.

At YSM, we embrace diversity and the unifying traditions of celebrating family and observing holidays in special ways. Join us in contributing to a world where every tradition is cherished, every journey celebrated, and every neighbour treated with respect and dignity.

Together, we can make this holiday season – and beyond – truly inspirational!



Angie's Letter: Come in, to open doors of hope!



In the Christian tradition, Advent is the season of anticipation, preparation and hope leading to Christmas. At YSM, it is also a season of celebration. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word meaning "come into" and while YSM is a safe and supportive place for our

community members to enter at *all times*, the holidays become a time when we invite people to "come in" even more than usual, to receive beyond what they might expect! This issue of *Urban Lights* introduces you to some of our annual traditions as well as new celebrations that invite our community to "come in" and celebrate together.

As you read this, the world around us is experiencing unspeakable crisis, unrest and uncertainty. It's important that while we are concerned for all who suffer around the world, we remain steadfast at YSM in continuing our daily work with those struggling in our own backyard - the men, women and children who seek the warmth, comfort and resources provided by Yonge Street Mission. We know these are challenging times for many. It is for this reason we are especially grateful to our loyal supporters for your

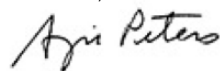
unwavering partnership which allows us to continue serving and to be able to give during this special season of hope and love.

In the coming days, with your support, we will offer joy to over 450 Regent Park families who will receive toys, games and books for their children. Together we will deliver warmth, community and connection for members of our Bridges community via a festive turkey dinner with all the fixings. And, together, we will welcome hundreds of community members of diverse backgrounds and holiday traditions to enrich our lives and help strengthen the fabric of our community.

Pope Benedict XVI was credited with a quote which shines a light on this season and the role of Advent: *"It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope."*

Hope is something we all need, even more than ever this year. As you read the stories in this issue of *Urban Lights*, may they awaken memories of goodness in your lives and open the doors of hope for our city and for the many neighbours YSM serves.

Shalom,



Toy Market welcomes your donations!

An extraordinary opportunity to bring joy to families in need this holiday season . . .

YSM's annual Christmas Toy Market, taking place on December 14, 15 and from 18-20, is a chance to spread warmth and love to Regent Park families.

Although the holidays may still seem distant, at YSM we're already hard at work to ensure over 450 families will experience the joy and wonder of the holiday. But we can't do it alone - *your caring support is needed!*

Here's how you can play a part: First, volunteer at the Toy Market, ensuring every family is met with kindness and generosity. Second, you can donate new toys, helping make children's wishes come true!

By contributing, you'll play a key role in ensuring over 950 kids in need will experience a joyful holiday from hardship. Your contribution, whether of time, children's toys, or both, will offer hope to those who may be struggling the most.

Contact volunteer@ysm.ca to learn about contributing your time. You can also purchase toys through the retailer of your choice and have them shipped directly to YSM, Attention: YSM Toy Market, 306 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON M5A 2G7. Or visit ysm.ca/toy-market/ to learn of ways to donate to the 2023 Toy Market.

Join us in sharing the magic of Christmas – together, we can ensure happy memories for many families!