

# CITY OF REFUGE

FALL 2023, VOL 27

## STRIDES FOR SANCTUARY

Our Annual Run/Walk/Roll



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# REFLECTING ON MY FIRST YEAR

By Simon Beck

It has now been a little over a year since I stepped into my role here at Sanctuary. Wow has it flown by! It has been filled with a lot of joy, and at times it has felt like a daunting task – especially at the start. While I had over a decade of experience working with nonprofits and charities around the world, I felt an immense weight of responsibility to be stewarding a precious community that I have long loved, and means a great deal to so many others.

Over the past year I have found myself returning to the words from the hymn *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, and in particular the lyrics,

“Here I raise my Ebenezer,  
hither by thy help I’ve come.  
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,  
safely to arrive at home.”

The lyrics come from 1 Samuel 7, where after an Israelite victory over the Philistines that would have been impossible without God’s help,

the Bible records: “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us’” (1 Samuel 7:12).

These words took on special meaning for me after my father’s death in a motorcycle accident in 2021, reminding me of how reliant on God we all are, fragile, and at all times utterly contingent on Him. At Sanctuary, I have been drawn back to this passage and these lyrics because as a community we are faced with constant reminders that it has only been by God’s help that we’ve come this far after 30 years.

For me, these lyrics bring to mind imagery of our community on a journey, each weighed down and carrying heavy rocks which symbolize the burdens we have collected over the years. We are gradually bent over by these burdens. Some can barely stumble forward under their cumulative weight. When it all seems too much,

in some sort of act of exhausted defiance, we pile up our rocks and raise our Ebenezers (which in Hebrew means 'stone of help') as a reminder to ourselves and others how far we've come.

Often God's goodness is made palpable in our life together as we bear each other's burdens, care for one another, and in this way, lighten each other's loads. While the community is a living witness of the Good News of Jesus, it is much bigger than you or me and what we can do on our own. We've only come this far because of God's help.

In getting to know some of the people who call Sanctuary home, it becomes clear that many people's lives in our community are marked and marred by a persistent precariousness, with very little by way of solid ground. It is a reminder of how dependent on God each of us ultimately is, whether or not our current trappings of life betray this reality. Many of our friends have had to become incredibly adept at navigating this broken world, and are profoundly resilient in opposition to the oppressive systems that ever threaten to overwhelm. Our friends continue to be full of love, openhanded, and trustworthy, despite bearing the wounds of cruelty, greed, and betrayals they have faced. It is unceremoniously humbling when you hear stories of what some have been up against – which for so many has been for much of their lives and with little support. These are times I find it hard to deny that I have encountered the miraculous – that they are still alive, and by God's good pleasure they have made it back to the home some call Sanctuary.

Similarly for Sanctuary as a whole; it's a miracle that we've collectively made it this far as a community for the past 30+ years. As we've emerged from COVID-19 in the last year, we have spent time stabilizing and re-centring. We've come to understand that a large part of the toll that the pandemic took on all of us was not being able to engage in many of the basic practices that have long sustained our life together. This past year, we've returned to many of these life-giving practices, including

Strides for Sanctuary (our annual run), Night at Grace's community concerts, worshiping in person together, loud and lively meals inside, art shows, and beach BBQs. In the return to these cherished rhythms and rituals of communal life, God's good pleasure has been made manifest. Each of these has allowed us to celebrate a new chapter beginning, and given us space to put down the burdens we have been carrying, even if just temporarily. In these celebratory acts of defiance we claim the goodness of God in the midst of the precariousness and struggles.

Coming out of the pandemic also meant that we could properly prioritize important anti-racism and anti-oppression work. At Sanctuary, we see and experience firsthand the ongoing impacts of systemic oppression, harmful theologies, and empty ideologies. Many have unjustly borne the weight of resistance alone for far too long. We have a responsibility to continue becoming more just as a community, and to embedding anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice into our ways. As we have taken up this work, we have a greater understanding of how these dynamics impact, are enabled by, and can take root in our community. It is a sobering reminder that we have only come so far by the help of God and His good pleasure. In coming to understand how subtle and nefarious the sins of racism and colonialism are, and how deep they go in each of us, it is undeniable that the only reason our small acts of resistance have any hope of making progress is because God is moving.

As we set our eyes on the future, my hope and prayer is that we discern where and how God's good pleasure is moving us. Where are we being called to enact the good news of Jesus to our friends, neighbors, City, and Church? There will surely be challenges in the year ahead: the worsening opioid epidemic, the cost of living crisis, and a desperate lack of affordable housing. But, in the face of overwhelming burden, let us muster within ourselves the faithfulness to raise our Ebenezers, remind ourselves that it has been by His help this far we've come, and know it will be by His good pleasure that we will find our way home.

# STRIDING AT THE SPIT

By Devin Lundrigan

On September 16th, on a beautifully bright Saturday morning, I joined the Sanctuary community for the first in-person Strides run/walk/roll event since before the pandemic. The mood was electric. Participants arrived, put their T-shirts on, pinned numbers to their chests and rushed to greet old friends – or make new ones. Coffee, donuts, and anticipation abounded.

I cannot overstate the stunning effect of the sunny, yellow Strides for Sanctuary T-shirts. Approaching Tommy Thompson Park and encountering a smiling, bright yellow crowd was transformative. They warmed me, and elevated my spirits instantly.

Ten minutes to go until we were all off and striding on our 10K or 5K courses. People chatted, pinned numbers on their chests, drank water, and ate muffins. A staff member, Gil, invited us all to join him in some stretching and warm-up exercises. One minute into the warm-up, he announced it was time to do burpees – rounds of push-ups followed by leaps in the air. Some people gamely attempted these exercises. The person beside me, however, said, “Burpees? If I do those it’ll be barf-ees.”

“On your marks, get set, go!” At 10:00am, we were off. A messy gaggle of almost 80 of us sprung into action, rolling, strolling, jogging and sprinting down the long causeway of Leslie Spit. As I walked, I took in the abundant and colourful plant life bordering both sides of the paved path. Black locust, poplar, and willow trees provided spotty shade. There were bursts of goldenrods and Queen Anne’s lace; clusters of purple asters and yellow yarrow, and ample milkweed and sow thistle (I was walking beside a horticulturalist). Summer sounds of cicadas and crickets filled the air, and the sun shone down over all of us.





All in our own fashion, we reached our halfway point, guzzled water, and headed back towards the finish line. And what a finish line! I could hear people cheering long before I could see them. When those cheerful yellow T-shirts came into view and people whooped in enthusiasm to see me, I felt so delighted that I immediately joined the cheering squad to celebrate the return of the rest of the Strides participants. One of the loudest cheerers was someone new I met named Pumpernickel. I told her how impressed I was with her sonorous hooting.

“You have to really get to know me,” she told me. “I got many talents.”

“I LOVE BEING WITH YOU PEOPLE!” someone shouted.



Once everyone was back from striding their course, we finished our time at Tommy Thompson Park by munching on sandwiches, chips, and fruity ice cream bars. I met a couple, Richard and Sarah, who ran their fifth race this year and challenged themselves to do the 10K course for the first time.

“It was wonderful,” Richard told me. “We really missed this during COVID.”

I also chatted with Amanda, a long-time community member, who was thrilled to be able to roll the race again for the first time in three years.

“I feel really happy,” she told me. I was cheering people along the way, saying, “Come on! You can do it. I have faith in you.”

I am not sure who won the 10K course, but I heard that the winner of the 5K race was a young man named Honour, who was awarded with a bag of potatoes.

As we were packing up and heading out – proud of ourselves, sweaty, voices hoarse from cheering, and yellow T-shirts still shining – a visitor to the park approached us curiously.

“Who are you guys?” She asked.  
“We’re Sanctuary,” came the answer.



# A DAY AT THE FARM

By Tanja Futter

Russet House Farms, owned by our board chair Sylvia Keesmat, and her husband Brian Walsh, is a beautiful oasis and retreat outside the city. During a sunny July day, we piled into cars to make the trek out to their farm in the Kawarthas. Excitement filled the air - we were told there would be frogs, fresh veggies, and maybe even a swim to be enjoyed!

When we arrived at the farm, we were offered warmth, welcome and a wonderful tour of the space - including advice to go down the winding path to visit the cows, much to the delight of the kids. We toured their extensive gardens and everyone munched on fresh sugar snap peas. We played "guess what is growing here" and dreamt about what would soon be ready. We snacked on red currants as many of us explored the fields and visited the cows, while others stayed to connect and relax in their kitchen. The highlight for almost everyone was another frog catching adventure with Aindrea, our nurse, who not only taught some of the kids (and adults) how to catch a frog, but managed to cement her title of being the best frog catcher

any of us have ever met. She caught multiple frogs and this time managed to not fall in the water! Our beloved Froggie, a long-time member of our community, was once again reunited with her favourite creatures. After a little prodding and many kisses, she finally allowed us to put the frogs back in the water before we left. The day was topped off with a swim in the lake followed by ice cream!

Often in the rush of life, the chaos of survival, the busy-ness of community meals, the hustle of the city, we forget what it is to be still for a moment. The day at Russet House Farms was for many of us a chance to do just that. We spent the day delighting in God's creation and in one another. Outings like this one are cherished memories for many of us - a moment to breathe and hear the birds, space for conversations, and chance to enjoy really precious relationships. Our afternoon was a reminder of the beauty of sharing life together. The moments we shared give us sustenance for the road ahead, and remind us of the goodness of God and the joy that relationships bring.



# COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT



## UPDATE: A NEW LIFT

In early spring our decades-old lift suffered its terminal breakdown. It would be the latest in what had become a pattern of routine malfunctions and long down-times as we waited for rare and expensive parts. Replacing our lift was a financial priority, because without it, many in our community could not come inside for community meals, to use our showers, computers, find clean clothes, etc. While the rest of the community moved back inside, we continued serving meals outside so that building accessibility issues didn't prevent anyone from enjoying food and friendship at Sanctuary. In the interim, some folks made their way inside using our Evac-chair, but this was hardly a dignified solution for everyone. On September 7th, Michael was the first to test drive our newly certified lift, giving it two thumbs up! We are so thankful for the financial support we received for this essential upgrade.

## NEW STAFF SPOTLIGHT: RICA PICCIO

We have welcomed a number of new faces to our staff team this year. We will be spotlighting each of them in the coming newsletters so you can get to know them all a little better. Rica Piccio joined our team in April of this year. She brings with her tremendous enthusiasm and has jumped headfirst into her role as the Donor & Stakeholder Relations Coordinator. We have Rica to thank for coordinating our return to an in-person Strides for Sanctuary event this September.

Reflecting on her first five months with us, Rica shares, "It's about cultivating a space where people can be themselves. It's about reminding each other that we're not alone, that there's hope in the midst of hardship. And it's about working together to build a better world, one conversation and one warm meal at a time. My heart is full of gratitude to be a part of the Sanctuary Community."

## UPCOMING EVENT

**NIGHT AT GRACE'S**  
**DECEMBER 1, 2023**  
**25 CHARLES ST E**  
**5:00 PM - 9:00 PM**

**ART SHOW**  
**5:00 PM**

**COMMUNITY CONCERT**  
**7:00 PM**





# FINANCIAL UPDATE

By Simon Beck

I am so grateful for the steadfast support from our supporters and donors in spite of the challenging economic environment. Earlier in the year, I shared with you that our donations were running behind budget as donations slowed due to many of the same forces that are impacting our community: rising cost of housing, rapid food inflation, and the spectre of recession. I am happy to report that now a few months later, we have seen a strong recovery in our donations and we have made up most of our budget shortfall. This has meant that we have not had to reduce the support we offer for our community.

Thank you to each of you who continue to faithfully support and pray for us.

**[SANCTUARY]**

## I WANT TO HELP!

### DONATE

#### CREDIT CARD

[donate.sanctuarytoronto.ca](https://donate.sanctuarytoronto.ca)

#### AUTOMATIC MONTHLY DEBIT

[tinyurl.com/sanctuaryPAG](https://tinyurl.com/sanctuaryPAG)

CHEQUE/MONEY ORDER payable to  
Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto

### U.S. DONORS

CHEQUE/MONEY ORDER payable to  
First Church of the Nazarene  
Mail to Sanctuary c/o Radical Mission.  
Attn. Leighanne Guthrie  
150 Richview Rd. Clarksville, TN 37043

**TAX RECEIPTS FOR ALL ELIGIBLE  
GIFTS WILL BE SENT AT YEAR-END  
(Charitable # 890379340 RR0001)**

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