



*Left: Linda Powell serving food at Loaves & Fishes in Brockville; Top: Entrance to Loaves & Fishes Brockville on Perth St, Bottom: Entrance to The Pier Community Outreach (under Royal Brock Hotel in Brockville)*

# THE GIFT OF BEING PART OF A COMMUNITY

By Tanya Shukalova

Christmas is known for being everybody's favorite holiday. It is a time to take a break from work and enjoy the season. Sometimes we get so excited about the holidays that we forget how fortunate we are, that not everyone has a family to come home to or gifts to open on Christmas morning.

Where do you go if you don't have a family member organizing the Christmas dinner gathering at their house?

Thanks to places like Loaves and Fishes-142 Perth St, Brockville, we have a place for people to enjoy great company and have a dinner if they feel they have no one to turn to. For years, Loaves and Fishes have been providing hundreds of people with a holiday meal in December. This year, their turkey dinner will be held on December 16th (4pm - 6:30pm), as well as a Soup and Sandwich Fundraiser on December 3rd (11:30am - 1:30pm). The restaurant was founded on the belief that in the sharing of bread, a community is built. A community

where barriers between people vanish, where dignity and respect flourish, and where service and acceptance unite. This is a place where warmth and understanding prevail. When people in the community look beyond themselves and beyond their dinner table, they can reach out to someone who is less fortunate.

The Pier Christian Church in Brockville also commits to supporting everyone in the community. They believe that it is critically important that everyone hears, sees, and experiences the love and hope they have in Jesus Christ. Especially at Christmas time, people may have no one close to love or be thankful for, so it is important for places like The Pier to have open arms to anyone who needs a smile or a warm meal when it is cold outside. They will be hosting a breakfast on Christmas day at 10 am, as well as a Supper on the 20th of December (3:30pm - 5:30pm). These meals will be free and anyone that wants to join is welcome. (Visit them @100 Stewart Blvd (under The Royal Brock Hotel).

Different cultures have different beliefs and ways of celebrating the holidays. One common theme is the gift of giving. Giving should not be done only to feel good about ourselves or to think that we are better than someone else. When we show love to people, whether it be through a gift, serving them dinner, or even simply a smile, a connection is formed. Through that connection, the other person is filled with warmth and happiness for even the briefest moment. That moment should be treasured more than anything we could ever receive under a Christmas tree.

Those who may have suffered a loss in their family or relationship during the holidays need our compassion. The entire basis of the holidays is to share gifts and give love. If someone doesn't have the option of either, they would feel left out. In a community we cannot leave people out. A lot of people tend to get caught up with shopping, making sure stockings are filled and the wish list is checked off. But we forget that there is more to Christmas than just our own "holiday routine."

Whether you have a large traditional family or just a beloved pet, everyone deserves a beautiful, festive Christmas time. The holiday is meant to show what we are thankful for. We can do that by being thankful for everything we do have and sharing our hearts with others. Don't be afraid to try something different this year and volunteer at a charity or drop a gift shoebox off at a Church or food bank. A gesture that seems so small to you could make the biggest difference in someone's life. **LH**