



40th Anniversary

The Companion

February 2014
Vol. 24 No. 1

Emmaus Ministries • 345 East Ninth Street •
Erie, PA 16503-1107 • (814) 459-8349
www.emmauserie.org

*Happy the one...
Who keeps faith
forever,
secures justice
for the oppressed,
gives food
to the hungry.*

Psalm 146



from Sister Mary-

Dear Friends of Emmaus,

“Staying at what is worth doing does as much to remake us as it does to remake the world,” wrote Joan Chittister, OSB. I thought about that quote a lot as we paged through 40 years of newsletters and newspaper clippings to prepare this anniversary issue. As I looked at the photos of so many guests and volunteers who became part of the Emmaus family over the decades, I realized the truth of Joan’s words—I have been remade because of them.

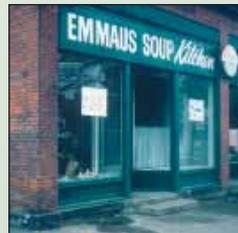
And by remade I mean that over the years my soul has been stirred and stretched by soup kitchen guests that I grew to love and admire—Dancing Machine, Dumpster Dan, Margaret, Larry, Michelle, to name a few. Here’s one example of how Emmaus has remade me. On the serving line at the kitchen, volunteers constantly ask our guests, “How are you today?” And our guests—who have no food at home, stand in line for one meal, and cannot choose what they will eat each evening—more often than not, respond, “I am blessed.” I try to use their words as a mantra, repeating, “I am blessed” throughout the day—no matter what happens to me.

In this issue we are sharing a few of these “soul-stirring” stories—from guests, volunteers, staff, and donors—that draw out the best in us.

As for staying at something for 40 years in hope of “remaking the world,” ...well, Emmaus’s contribution has been minimal but steady. The soup kitchen opened on January 9, 1974 at Immaculate Conception Church and twelve volunteers served one guest a bowl of soup; we now serve 200 a day. In 1983 we opened the Emmaus Food Pantry to help the working poor who needed extra food to stretch meager budgets. When an elementary teacher told me that she asked one of her students, “What are you having for supper today?” and the child replied, “What’s supper? We only eat in school.”—we opened Sister Gus’ Kids Cafe. Emmaus also sponsors



HOLLAND ST.



DANCING MACHINE



PARADE ST.



a Women's Advocacy program, the Emmaus Children's Christmas Program, and an outreach to Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Last year we opened Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School to help people grow healthy food.

To celebrate a 40th anniversary means that the faithful staff, volunteers and donors believe Emmaus is worth doing. It certainly has been worth my life. It is a privilege to be remade each day by the people we serve and by you.

P.S. We are celebrating our 40th by holding a monthly raffle at the soup kitchen for a year. Each month one lucky guest will receive a gift worth \$40. In January we gave away a new pair of boots; in February, two \$20 gift cards to Dominick's 24-Hour Eatery....

Sister Mary



Marie S., January winner

Soul of the Director

When I first started at Emmaus I wanted to make sure no one took advantage of me, to prove that I wasn't too soft for the job. One day Jimmy M. asked for an extra plate to take home to his sick wife. I thought his smooth talking was a con and so I said "No," I refused him an extra plate of food. Less than a week later, I saw him pushing his wife down the street in a wheelchair and knew I had judged him unfairly and an apology was in order.

✚
Some days when I go home from the soup kitchen I pray even harder. Some days I go home and I can't pray at all. Some days it's my faith that gets me through and other days I don't have any faith at all.

✚
I don't think soup kitchens should exist in this country. We need to rearrange the system so that the "have-nots" have something and the "haves" have a little bit less. Soup kitchens are band aids...they're not the answer to the problem. You have to get to the cause. As a sister, I feel we have to stand up with the poor—not just feed them, but speak for them.

✚
Dumpster Dan was a slightly built man whose fondness for scavenging in dumpsters earned him his nickname. I saw him sketching a vase of flowers in the kitchen one day and we started to talk about art. He told me that he spent a lot of time in the public library because there was nowhere else to go during the day and that he likes to browse the art section. "My favorite artist is Monet," he said. It was a moment of insight: Here is a man who lives out of dumpsters and his favorite artist is also mine. There is a fine line between those who distribute food and those who receive it. One twist in life and it could have been me waiting in a food line.

Quotes are taken from newspaper interviews with Sister Mary Miller.



The Soul of Emmaus

Pax, a center for nonviolence, opened the Emmaus Soup Kitchen in 1974. Three Erie Benedictine Sisters, who were part of the Pax Center, share the beginnings.

We had a wonderful spirit at Pax Center. When we saw there was a need, we just tried to meet it without worrying too much where the money or support was coming from. We really believed that if it was good work, God would care for it. For example, we started the soup kitchen because a few times a week, Joe, an elderly alcoholic, would ring our doorbell in the evening and ask for something to eat. "Was feeding the hungry a need in Erie?" we asked ourselves. To find out we didn't do a survey, we opened a soup kitchen.

—Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, OSB



Sister Rosanne, Sister Carolyn, Timothy Lynn, Sister Mary Lou

anyone call me by my name in years." When we opened the soup kitchen, I made it a point to stand at the door and greet everyone by name. —Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB

✚
I've always loved the story where Dorothy Day, founder of The Catholic Worker, was given a diamond ring by a donor and she, in turn, handed it over to a poor woman. Just gave it to her, no strings attached. Dorothy's staff was not happy and complained that it should have been earmarked for rent money or to pay the food bill. Dorothy replied that the woman had dignity and could use it for a trip to the Bahamas if she'd like. "Do you suppose God created diamonds only for the rich?" Dorothy asked the staff. I've always believed the poor should enjoy strawberries in December, a bottle of beer or glass of whiskey on Friday night, a pack of cigarettes for pure pleasure. As the English writer Samuel Johnson said, "Life is a pill which none of us can bear to swallow without gilding; yet for the poor we delight in stripping it still barer." The Pax Community started the soup kitchen to be a sign of the "reign of God," a lavish banquet, a display of God's extravagance toward each of us—rich or poor.

—Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB

Soul Stories

Alfred Angel. A new guest, Alfred, came to Emmaus for a meal. After eating his meal he approached the serving counter and asked for a paper napkin. He took a pen from his vest pocket and began to draw on the napkin. When he finished, he handed it to a volunteer and said, "I feel the presence of God here." On the napkin was a sketch of the face of Jesus. Alfred walked out the door and was never seen at the kitchen again.



✦ Sister Mary was cleaning up the soup kitchen with a new volunteer, and joked, "Sure are a lot of dirty dishes in this joint, aren't there, Nancy?" Before the teenager had a chance to respond, a voice answered, "This ain't a joint, Sister. This is a church." Sister Mary turned around and spotted one of the guests, tucked in the corner, finishing his dessert. Sister Mary walked over to Joe and sat down at the table. "Why did you say that, Joe?" she asked. "Why do you think this is a church?" Joe looked at her and said, "Because this is where I find God, Sister Mary. This is where God's work is done."

✦ Frank suffered from alcoholism and epilepsy. Sister Mary often let him into the kitchen before it opened though he never spoke to her, but sat at a corner table sipping coffee. One day a farmer walked in with two enormous beef livers. Sister Mary was grateful for the donation but after he left she said aloud, "What am I going to do with this?" From his table, she heard Frank stammer, "I used to be a butcher." "Well, what are you waiting for," Mary said. "Wash up and get busy." For the rest of the afternoon Frank worked like a surgeon, carefully removing the thin membrane and carving steak size pieces of liver. He and Mary had a wonderful animated conversation the entire time. But when the work was done, so was Frank. For the next 12 years,



Soul Stories

he barely spoke to Mary though she would often cradle his head and stroke his hand when he had a seizure at the kitchen. Frank, along with other transients, burned to death when the Railroad Hotel caught fire.



✦ It was right before Christmas and Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes was overwhelmed with trying to manage a personal gift giveaway for 2,000 children. In the middle of a hectic morning she got a phone call from a woman who was dying of bone cancer and had one last wish: She wanted someone to take her two girls Christmas shopping. Sister Rosanne stopped her work, picked up the two little girls and went shopping. When she suggested the girls buy a dress for their mother, the older girl said, "Her favorite color is pink." Two weeks before Christmas their mother was buried in that pink dress. "For me, Emmaus means always being there for the poor, being present when someone needs you," explained Sister Rosanne.

✦ Larry lived in a sewer under the tracks on 14th and State until some teenagers slashed his mattress to pieces. Then he moved to an unheated garage. When he first arrived at the soup kitchen, Larry only made guttural sounds. Gradually he responded to the kindness and care of volunteers and staff and told his story. Once a husband and father of two children with his own roofing business, Larry was struck by tragedy that for him proved unbearable. Both his children were killed in freak accidents and he found his wife with another man. An unusually bright man, he liked to engage in Scripture discussions and christened the group of men who sat at the same reserved table in the kitchen each day, "The Emmaus Board of Directors." He was a wonderful handyman who painted the ceiling and installed a rug in Sister Lucia and Claire Marie Surmik's apartment. It is no exaggeration to say that Larry found a home at the soup kitchen and was one of the most beloved of all guests. Many volunteers bonded with him, especially Kathy Spiegel who actually found him a small apartment and watched after him. Unfortunately, once Larry moved out of society, he could not make the leap back, despite the genuine love he encountered at the kitchen. Larry disappeared one day and never returned. Years later we learned he died at the Erie County Home and was buried in a Potter's Field. His portrait, drawn by Marie Spaeder, has a place of honor at the kitchen.



Soul Moments

John, an Old Russian Orthodox Believer, helped serve Christmas dinner at the soup kitchen each year. After washing the pots and pans, John bid a few stragglers “blessed Christmas” and prepared to leave. That’s when he noticed one of the guests wrapping plastic bags around his torn sneakers. John took off his shoes and gave them to the man. Then he trudged home through the snow in his socks.



✦ Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes was signing up people for baskets of food. A man walked in and she said to him, “If you need a turkey for Christmas, sign up at that table.” The man looked surprised and said, “Oh, no, Sister, I’m here to donate 40 turkeys. They’re in my car, I’ll go get them.” The young volunteers working with Sister Rosanne were dying. When the man left, they were jumping up and down, “Sister Rosanne, Sister Rosanne, don’t you know who that was? It’s Pat Monahan of Train.” (The local Erie rock sensation, lead singer of *Train*, winner of a Grammy Award for “Drops of Jupiter.”)



✦ Chuck, a soup kitchen guest, brought volunteer Lenora Lewis roses every Friday. “God knows where he got them,” she said, “but we had a special bond.” Lenora thinks the friendship was cemented when, while on vacation, she sent him a postcard, addressed to the soup kitchen. “He wrote me a thank you letter,” she said. “Can you imagine? A thank-you letter for a postcard.”

Soul Moments

✦ Polka, anyone? Margaret, a long-time guest at the soup kitchen, would always say, “Yes.” So would Sisters Claire Marie and Lucia Surmik, both excellent polka dancers. During the big holiday meals it became a tradition to have Margaret spinning around the soup kitchen with either Sister Claire Marie or Sister Lucia. The Surmik sisters, who share a combined 50 years of service at Emmaus, took special care of Margaret (as they do many other guests) calling her before each big celebration so she wouldn’t miss out. “She made us promise that we’d dance at her gravesite,” Sister Claire Marie said. And they did, taking a tape recorder to the cemetery and dancing the “Blue Skirt Waltz” polka as a final tribute to their dear friend.



Soul Glance Back—40th Anniversary

- 230,000 volunteers hours have served at the soup kitchen ...people like Marty Schaaf who’s been volunteering so long she’s lost count of the years though her reason for coming remains the same: “I always say to myself, ‘If it were my son or daughter, I’d be glad to know they weren’t hungry.’”
- 2-week-old infant who came with his mother and grandmother is the youngest soup kitchen guest...oldest guest was a 92 year old gentleman who walked 15 blocks every day for his one nourishing meal.
- 1,200,000 meals served at the soup kitchen...the menu grew from peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a bowl of soup to full-course meals.
- 24 years that Sister Lucia Surmik served as head “chef” at the soup kitchen...she was preceded in that role by Timothy Lee Lynn, Patrick Driscoll, Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski and Sister Mary Miller and followed by Shirley Whaley.
- \$1,000,000 largest gift received by Emmaus from an anonymous donor...to put the gift in perspective—of the annual donations given to Emmaus, 4% are gifts over \$500; 4% are gifts from \$100 to 499; and 92% of donations are less than \$100.



Sisters Lucia and Claire Marie Surmik

In Memory

Remembering Joe Wiczorek

The poor of Erie lost a great friend when florist Joe Wiczorek died. For 20 years he was the prime mover and organizer of the July 4th picnic for the poor held at the Pfeiffer-Burleigh School playground. When Joe had the idea for the picnic he called Emmaus and said, "Every American deserves a picnic on the 4th of July no matter their economic status." In the last few years over 2,000 people enjoyed the free picnic. Joe brought stunning fresh flowers arrangements to the soup kitchen regularly, was the main impetus behind the East Side Florists who every Christmas come to the soup kitchen and decorate it in a manner that rivals any store on Fifth Avenue in New York. Joe didn't want any publicity while he was alive, but now that he has died, we want to give proper tribute to this good man, this beautiful friend who brought such beauty to the poor.



We are grateful to family members who asked that memorials be made to Emmaus in the names of their deceased loved ones.

Roger Edwin Barlow
 Kathleen "Kathy" E. (Heintz) Borgia
 Charles Richard "Dick" Bowen
 Robert P. "Bob" Cashin
 Martha Costella Colgan
 Elizabeth L. "Betty" Justka DeSantis
 Daniel E. Desser
 William F. DiPietro

Shirley Jean (Laase) Skellie Kikola
 Kathleen Froess Malinowski
 Jacqueline M. Menzel
 Donald G. Metzger
 Katherine "Kay" Zuravleff Orloff
 Magdalena Margaret (Schlecht) Piotrowski
 Don St. George
 Marion A. (Strawbridge) Sipple
 Frank W. Vybiral
 Joseph W. Wiczorek
 Raymond Wieszczyk, Sr.
 Richard M. Wilczynski

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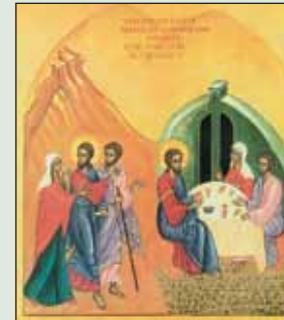
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They came to know Him in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:35

