From Sister Mary . . .

Dear Friends,

People come to Emmaus for food…right? Of course, they do, but there’s much more to the story.

Last week, for example, I greeted a guest who had just started undergoing cancer treatment. He showed me his chemo port, and told me that he now gets his nutrition through a feeding tube. I said how good it was to see him and I was sorry about his illness, but added “I suspect then that you’re not here for our sit-down dinner.”

“Oh, I’m not here for dinner, Sister Mary,” he said. “I just came by to see everyone!”

A few days later, another regular guest came to the kitchen, covered in scrapes and bruises. She was a transgender woman, and the night before, while sleeping on the street, she had been attacked by two men. She was afraid they would come after her again that evening, and both the men’s shelter and women’s shelters were filled. So she came to Emmaus and told us what was wrong, and we found her somewhere to spend the night, got her the medical care she needed, and helped her begin to form a plan to stay safe with the help of community partners. “I didn’t know where to go,” she said. “But I came to you because everyone here is always so kind.”

We do serve a delicious, homemade dinner at Emmaus, but that’s not always why people come. They really come because they know we care about them. They are loved here.

Saint Therese of Lisieux wrote, “My vocation is love. I will become love, and then I will be all things.” It’s a challenge, of course, but that’s exactly what we’re on 11th Street for: to serve meals, to greet friends, to help in a crisis, to become love itself.

In this issue of The Companion, you’ll read about some of the many ways that Emmaus lives out the calling to be a soup kitchen that is “all things” for our guests.

In peace,

Sister Mary Miller,
Director of Emmaus,
outside the soup kitchen

About the Cover: On the cover of this issue of The Companion are passion flowers growing outside the soup kitchen—a wonderfully fragrant and intricate flower.

Photo by Mary Miller, OSB
TO FEED THE HUNGRY: CATHERINE SIMON, SOUP KITCHEN AND FOOD PANTRY COORDINATOR

One of the most difficult parts of the pandemic was not seeing our “usual” guests in the “usual” way at the soup kitchen. Many we haven’t seen since 2020—either because they didn’t come for dinner or because we were forced to hand out meals through a window for two years.

So, the other day, when a long-time guest came back for dinner after many months away, Colleen Hammon, a volunteer, and I greeted Stan with such excitement. “Stan, we missed you!” we exclaimed as we threw our arms around him. We told him how worried we had been when he hadn’t been coming for dinner. He seemed confused. “Why were you worried?” he asked. Colleen and I explained that we didn’t know if anything had happened to him, if he was sick, or something else. Stan responded, “I didn’t realize how much you cared.”

It’s so important to keep in mind that Emmaus’s motto has two parts—Bread for the body AND care for the soul.
Emmaus Welcomes Jane Wagner to the Kids Cafe!

Jane Wagner joined the Emmaus staff as the Kids Cafe coordinator in July. A lifelong educator, Jane has both taught and served as administrator in both parochial and public schools. Most recently, she spent eight years as principal of Blessed Sacrament School. Jane answered questions for ministry assistant, Sister Valerie Luckey about her new role at the Kids Cafe and her time as an educator.

Sister Val: Why, after retiring from parochial school, did you decide to come to the Kids Cafe?
Jane: I have always been a person who loves to teach, to learn, to discover, to share with others, and I am still like that today. I love to take a deep dive into everything I do, and I refer to myself as a lifelong learner. I think that motivates me as a teacher. I hope I can spread that desire to learn to the children at the Kids Cafe.

I have always said to students, “You have your dreams and your goals: wanting to be a nurse or a mechanic. But don’t limit yourself because you never know where your path will lead you. Keep trying new things.” I think it makes you a well-rounded person if you don’t limit yourself to one thing.

What is the most important value you want to impart to the Kids Cafe children? Why?
I am going to say kindness because that’s what I have always worked hard at as a teacher: to impart a desire for kindness. I tell students that you can work hard at being kind. We are human, so we are going to make mistakes, but if we try to be kind, it can make a difference. I try to teach children that their kindness will be passed onto others. I know it can seem like a “pie-in-the-sky” kind of dream, but I do believe in it.

An Emmaus Almanac

Almanacs are annual guides that help orient us to what is important in our daily lives. The Emmaus Almanac gives short glimpses and reflections of the mission and work of feeding those in need.

September 11: The Gospel for today begins with the Pharisees complaining about Jesus, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Jesus goes on to tell several stories explaining that no matter what the circumstances of a person’s life may be, no matter how they may be, God’s love for them never runs out. Each night, a long line forms outside the doors of the Emmaus soup kitchen, full of the lives of the Emmaus Almanac gives short glimpses and reflections of what is important in our daily lives. The Emmaus Almanac gives short glimpses and reflections of the mission and work of feeding those in need. The Emmaus motto, “Bread for the body, care for the soul,” could have been written by her.

(L-R) Common Threads participant, Nora Horihan with program instructor, Bonnie Triola

September 17: Today is the feast of Saint Hildegard of Bingen, a medieval mystic, Benedictine abbess, composer and scientist. She had a keen interest in health and medicine, and many of her recipes can still be read and followed today. In a time when extreme fasting was a common spiritual practice, Hildegard taught her followers to eat in a way that kept their bodies strong and healthy. The Emmaus motto, “Bread for the body, care for the soul,” could have been written by her.

September 24: On this date in 1993, a local newspaper profiled Common Threads, which was then a new program run by Emmaus Ministries. Intended to help lift women out of poverty, Common Threads offered training in using knitting machines, as well as education on budgeting and job readiness. The piece notes, “The sisters try to imbue the women with a sense of monastic spirituality. On one of the walls of the shop hangs free verse written by Erie Benedictine Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, ‘There isn’t anyone you couldn’t love once you’ve heard their story.’” Common Threads operated for ten years and touched the lives of countless families.

Chalk Art created by Jane and the Kids Cafe staff on display during Celebrate Erie
Sister Colette Korn has retired twice. Retirement number two was from Emmaus where, for the past ten years, she volunteered regularly, assisting the Women’s Advocate, Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes.

“I was 75 when I retired from my hospice work, but I still wanted to do something. Sister Rosanne heard that and said she could use my help, so I started coming in a few days a week,” Sister Colette shared. She said that she most enjoyed her work helping the poor of the city when she was organizing giveaways at the food pantry. Regularly scheduled “garage sales,” as Sister Colette called them, where there was only one price: free, allowed her to interact with guests and see just how much need existed in Erie. “We would put out towels, dishes, books, clothing, a little bit of everything. And everything would go within an hour. There would be nothing to take back upstairs. I thought to myself, ‘Wow! People really need these things.’”

Though she recently retired from Emmaus, Sister Colette continues to minister. She can now be found as a welcoming presence at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery where she works at the front desk, greeting visitors, guiding guests, and answering the phone.
We Give Thanks . . .

Emmaus Ministries gives a big “Thank you” to... Theresa Anderson and A Hand Up Erie for donating hundreds of dishes to give away... Robin Scheppner and American Tinning and Galvanizing for their regular donations of bottled water... the Children at the Neighborhood Art House for weeding and planting flowers in front of the soup kitchen... The Breakfast Place for its donation of eggs and loaves of bread... Debbie and Mark Woods for many Kids Cafe donations including clothing, bubbles, chalk, and hula hoops... Ken Krein for his donation of garden vegetables throughout the summer... Gary Cachion for supporting the Kids Cafe chalk art display at Celebrate Erie...

Janel Potratz-Levin at Potratz for vegetables plants... Darrell Meyers and the volunteer group from Our Lady of Peace Parish for working at the soup kitchen during a day of service... Hungry Howie’s for their donation of cheese and pepperoni... Cheryl Bough for a donation of many, many pairs of gloves before the snow begins! Jack Mehler and MacDonald Illig for choosing to sponsor Emmaus in the Erie Insurance Charity Challenge golf tournament... To everyone who makes our work possible, THANK YOU!

Emmaus Ministries Remembers

We are grateful to family members who asked that memorials be made to Emmaus in the name of their deceased loved ones:
Theresa Ann (Santor) Feyas
William Michael Litzinger (volunteer)
Carol Bianchi Tipton
Rose Marie Jaskiewicz

Emmaus also remembers our faithful volunteers who have passed away:
Irene Fendya
Joan Marie (Saluga) Vereb

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

Luke 24:35