

For the New Year, a Call to Hearts and Hands



St. Teresa of Avila said, "Christ has no body now but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world."

The holidays make us more aware of this. This is when charitable contributions go up, when volunteer numbers climb at feeding programs like ours, when people clamor to buy a gift for a needy child. And every nonprofit frets about what will happen come January.

Our Christian living is not seasonal, however. We live our faith every day in ordinary ways: what we do with our money, where we shop, how we interact with

people on the street or in our workplace or schools. The early church was known for its compassionate action and sharing of resources. St. Michael's has long reached out to others, serving as a community center for activity and care in the neighborhood. This identity is fueling our renovations work. We want even more to be hands and feet of love and care for others.

How are you living out this call to serve in your life? Perhaps this might figure into your New Year's resolutions. May God fill our hearts and hands with love. — *Mother Kate*

Saturday Kitchen Christmas



Give us this day our daily bread. But a person doesn't live by bread alone.

The Saturday Kitchen nourishes body and spirit by serving 350 meals every week, twice as many as before the pandemic, marshaling a small army of volunteers from the church and the community who swarm the Parish House to prepare, pack and deliver bags of food to the gate as the line of guests stretches around the corner to Amsterdam Avenue.

On Dec. 17, the Christmas menu included roast beef au jus, baked potatoes, broccoli, a jar of peanut butter, bread, a bag of pistachios, apple crisp and canned chicken and fish — a Meal Plus, as they say. Choir members on their way to a 10 a.m. rehearsal sang carols to the guests, who joined in.

On 99th Street, Deacon Richard Limato welcomed the guests, talked and joked with them and sometimes prayed with them. Volunteers tended a coffee station and a giveaway clothing table. At the gate, Omar Santos swiftly dispensed the bags with a word to everybody. The meals are grab-and-go but a camaraderie prevailed among the guests and between them and the volunteers.

"The mission is to feed those who have food insecurity, but at a deeper level it's to give people a sense of being truly cared for," says co-



warden John Avery, a longtime volunteer who also writes the annual grant application to Episcopal Charities, which specifically asks about the church's outreach beyond providing food. The Kitchen also gives nonparishioners the chance to volunteer for the community.

The ringleader, impresario and master chef is Ray Luetters, a longtime parishioner and former restaurateur, who sometimes joins Rick Hamlin to serenade volunteers and guests with Broadway duets. Ray orchestrates advance-prep crews throughout the week. Cuisines have included Caribbean, Chinese, French, Italian, Korean, Vietnamese — and all-American barbecue.

Ray's sources include a cornucopia of suppliers, channeled principally through the Food Bank of New York and its affiliates, along with for-profit Restaurant Depot. Christmas menu planning began in October but Ray must always improvise, depending on available ingredients. Also in the bags are supplementary breads and baked goods from Breads Bakery and Whole Foods.

Ray presides over the Kitchen three-ring circus with élan. He once wanted to become a minister. Now he has found another calling. "Being in service to others is probably the most Christian thing we can do," he says.



From top: The Saturday Kitchen crew, normally in a blur, pauses after John Avery says an interfaith prayer. Bread Bandits Daniel Inzinga, Martha Livingston and Mark Young unload after a Friday-night run to Breads Bakery on the East Side. Midnight Marauders Paul Cunningham and Jeff Jeffreys collect at Whole Foods just before closing time on Friday. Kris Ishibashi leads a Friday crew bagging surplus pistachios. Oliver Bowcock packs surplus peanut butter. Deacon Richard calls himself "the sidewalk chaplain." Guests include more immigrants and families with children.

Community Is Key: Kamar and Iman Abdulfattah

Living in the neighborhood, for years they watched guests line up along West 99th Street. "I've seen the line grow over my lifetime," daughter Iman Abdulfattah says. The social and political upheavals of 2016 catalyzed Iman to get involved and to forge deeper ties with the community. She

started volunteering and soon "reeled in my mom," Kamar Abdulfattah. Kamar helps prepare meals on Wednesdays. Both serve on Saturday. Iman also has been a Midnight Marauder. When Iman isn't at the Kitchen, she can be found working as an executive assistant at the

New York City College of Technology or pursuing a Ph.D. in Islamic Art and Architecture from the University of Bonn. Kamar, born in Cairo, is retired from Chase Bank's loan division. She has lived on the Upper West Side since 1973.

Both are impressed by the Saturday Kitchen operation — and the output. Saturday Kitchen chef Ray Luetters "comes from the restaurant world," Iman points out. "He brings a level of professionalism that everyone appreciates, whether you're packing, serving, washing — or receiving food."

Mother and daughter are both keenly aware: More than bodies are being nourished on Saturday.

"Community is key," says Iman. "Some guests line up as early as 6 a.m. It's not fear that there won't be food. There will be food. They're coming because the Soup Kitchen is part of their routine. A part of their lives."

"When I joined I saw how people really need the help," Kamar agrees. "Some are very, very nice people. They just need to come and talk sometimes." — Ned Boyajian



Iman and Kamar Abdulfattah, daughter/mother volunteers in the Saturday Kitchen, finish each other's sentences "Meals are prepared using fresh ingredients, fresh produce, fresh chicken. A lot of organic ingredients. It's restaurant-level food that anyone would want to eat."

Omar Santos, Saturday Kitchen Gatekeeper

For more than 10 years, Omar Santos, our maintenance staffer, has been the face of the parish to the long and growing-longer line of Saturday Kitchen guests, many of whom he knows as regulars.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please get on line!" he says at 9:30 a.m. (his workday had begun at 6 a.m.). "We're about to start!"

Omar greets everybody, in English or Spanish, while quickly handing out the grab-and-go meal bags.

"We're seeing many more immigrants, mainly from South America but also from Europe, with Russians," he says. "And many more families."

The line is peaceful, orderly and friendly, not least because Omar radiates calm.

Across the sidewalk the giveaway clothing table, overseen by Ieda Fuller, is busy. "If you want to donate, the number one thing is socks and toiletries," Omar says. "That's like gold."

Asked what parishioners should know about Saturday Kitchen, Omar says, "To get a good picture of what it's like to be down on your luck and really suffering, come volunteer and see how these people try to survive. It's a reality check."



At the gate Omar Santos has noticed more immigrants from South America and Europe. "I watch the news on TV and on Saturday morning I see how the politics affect us directly here," he says.

Meg German on the Saturday Kitchen's Origin



Meg German, a founder of the Saturday Kitchen, feasted at the Christmas Brunch with friend Carole O'Connor-Edwards.

The Saturday Kitchen began with a basic impulse to help people in need, as our longtime parishioner Meg German remembers.

The start date is uncertain but at least 40 years ago, after Father Frederick Hill became rector in 1976.

"The neighborhood at that time was filled with people who were begging," Meg says. "Charlotte and Frank Patton had the idea that we ought to do something about it."

The Kitchen started with a noon meal. Meg and her late husband James, along with the Pattons and other parish volunteers, prepared dishes like spaghetti and meatballs that could be scaled up as more guests appeared. The founding families publicized the meal by putting up posters on streetlamps.

"We wanted it to be very nice for our guests, so we set out placemats and napkins in the Parish House, with flowers on the tables," Meg says. "When the room was full, we'd have a second seating."

James, a physician scientist, did research on genetics and cancer at the Rockefeller Institute. Meg raised two children (she has six grandchildren now) and volunteered for Planned Parenthood, among other organizations.

What did faith have to do with the Saturday Kitchen's founding? "The Gospel calls us to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself," Meg says. "Our soup kitchen is loving our neighbors as ourselves."



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