

\*  
*The virtue  
 of largesse  
 is the  
 willingness  
 to minister  
 beyond what  
 we think  
 possible.*

—Bill Callahan



WEDDING FEAST  
 by  
 John August Swanson

## From Sister Mary . . .

Dear Friends,

This month Benedictine Sisters celebrate the feast of our patron, Saint Scholastica. We are told that she was the twin sister of Saint Benedict and founded many monasteries for women. There is only one recorded story from her life, but we tell and retell it with relish.

*It seems that once a year Scholastica and Benedict met for a family visit and the two great souls had weighty conversations. One year the conversation was so inspiring that Scholastica asked her brother to stay the night so they could continue talking. But Benedict was a stickler for the law and reminded his sister that no good monk was allowed to be absent from the monastery overnight. Scholastica's instinct was love—she loved her brother and wanted to be with him, and she felt that through their shared love both could grow in love of God and others. So, she put her head on the table and prayed fervently to God to intervene. Immediately a torrential storm arose that prevented Benedict from leaving.*

The person telling this story, Saint Gregory the Great, concludes: “Scholastica realized, according to the saying of St. John, ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). Therefore, as is right, she who loved more, did more.”

This issue of *The Companion* celebrates love beyond the ordinary, or the virtue of largesse—an extreme, overflowing generosity of spirit towards others. A retreat director once said that most of us need others to call us to largesse. He used the wedding at Cana as an example of how Mary opened the heart of Jesus to greater giving. I tend to agree. It’s the people whose stories you read in this newsletter—the volunteers, the staff, the guests—who crack open my sealed heart and insist that I am capable of greater love.

In peace,

*Sister Mary*



Sister Mary

## Living the Virtue of Largesse

### **Staff: Rita Scrimenti**

On any weeknight evening at the soup kitchen, you might find Emmaus's social worker, Rita Scrimenti, deep in conversation with a guest. Or putting together a bag with socks and a winter hat for someone who doesn't have either. Or taking a phone call from someone requesting assistance with rent or utilities. Or you might find Rita working with a volunteer to set up a clothing giveaway. In short, you can find Rita's spirit of largesse on display in any number of ways.

Although Rita's faithfulness to the poor of the city requires interaction with others, she has not let the pandemic slow her down. She has adapted her ministry to ensure that Emmaus continues to care for those in greatest need in safe ways. During the warmer months, Rita, alongside soup kitchen volunteers who help her, could be found outside talking to guests at a social distance, asking what needs Emmaus might help fill. She also coordinated efforts to help guests complete the census and register to vote. As temperatures cooled, she set up regular giveaways at the back door so guests could stop by for toiletries and other donated items after picking up a to-go dinner.

Rita also maintains contact with other local social services agencies such as the Mental Health Association of Northwestern PA and the Health Care for the Homeless Partnership. She has hosted socially-distanced brown bag lunches for volunteers, as well as Zoom meetings, to stay connected with each other. Rita's commitment exemplifies the spirit of largesse that makes the world a more compassionate one.

### **Volunteers: Debbie Robertson**

Staff member, Sister Valerie Luckey, interviewed Emmaus volunteer, Debbie Robertson, about her experience at the food pantry and soup kitchen. Her commitment and love were clear. The following is an excerpt. To read the rest of the interview, visit [www.emmauserie.org](http://www.emmauserie.org).

#### **• Why do you think your heart is so committed to Emmaus?**

There is such a need at Emmaus. I see all the people who come through the line, and I know there is a food shortage in this neighborhood. The little bit that we can do here reminds me of what Mother Teresa says, "If you can't feed one thousand, just feed one." I try to do that when I am here on Monday and Tuesday mornings.

**• You mentioned a few needs that you see while volunteering. Are there any other needs that you see for our guests?**

In the winter time, it's gloves and socks. So, I go to the Dollar Store in November,



Rita Scrimenti with a guest during a giveaway



Debbie Robertson

## Living the Virtue of Largesse

and I pick up every pair of gloves off their shelves. A woman came into the food pantry one morning and gave me her hands; they were so cold when I felt them. Our guests can't afford that dollar. Then, I look at my own drawer and I see 40 pairs of socks. I can give something to them, and I try to do that.

**• Do you have any memories that stick out from your time at Emmaus?**

At the soup kitchen, when we served guests in the dining room, there was someone who came in each day, and he loved desserts! He would come up to me because he knew I was a soft touch; I gave in easily. He would say, "Deb. Deb. Can I have another dessert?" So I would always sneak him something because it gave him such pleasure to have an extra dessert.

### **Community: Dominick's Diner**

Despite the best precautions, the Covid-19 virus threatened to briefly close the soup kitchen during the holidays. "One of our main staff was exposed and we faced a dilemma," explained Sister Mary Miller, Director. "Should we put other staff and volunteers at risk and continue serving our daily take-out meal or should we close down for a week?" Instead, Emmaus chose a third option. A phone call was made to Dominick's, a diner two blocks from the soup kitchen, to see if Emmaus could purchase dinner gift cards for five days. "Dominick's has been so good to us over the years," explained Sister Mary, "and I know that it, like many local restaurants, has been suffering due to dining restrictions. It was an opportunity for us to repay Dominick's for its goodness to us and to show a bit of largesse by giving our guests a special treat."

"I can't even begin to tell you how much this helped us," said Tony Ferraro, owner of Dominick's. "It's a beautiful thing when people reach out to help one another." Tina Ferraro, co-owner, added, "This isn't a joke, but I truly felt like this was a gift from God. We were trying to figure out how to make it—we weren't going to be able to meet payroll and our mortgage didn't stop—and then Tony got the call from Sister Mary. It kept us going."

According to Tony and his wife, Tina, everything went smoothly, and soup kitchen guests were happy to get out of the cold and have a chance to order off a menu. What was the most requested meal? "No contest," said Tony, "Everyone's favorite was the boneless chicken wing basket with fries."



Tina Ferraro inside Dominick's

# Soup's On Blog: An Emmaus Staff Journal

To read more entries, visit [www.emmauserie.org](http://www.emmauserie.org)

**October 30, 2020:** I was serving at the soup kitchen the other evening when someone coming through the line asked to talk to a sister. I went over to the window where we hand out meals and saw Michael. Michael has been a faithful donor to Emmaus for a couple years, offering monthly what he can to support our ministry while also coming through our dinner line regularly. He wanted to explain to me that he hadn't sent donations in a while because he had been in prison and was recently released. He said to me, "Sister Mary, I want to begin making my monthly contribution again. And I want to thank you for these great boots Emmaus gave me," as he lifted his leg to show me his foot.

I replied, "No, Michael, you must take care of yourself first." But, he insisted, "This is what I want to do." During these times when so much has changed, I continue to be struck by the consistent gratitude and generosity of the poor in our city who come to Emmaus. —**Sister Mary Miller**

**November 20, 2020:** Because of COVID-19 our annual coat drive was low-key this year. Instead of a major blitz in church bulletins asking people to donate warm coats, our faithful organizer Kelley Glass sent an email to 17 of her friends asking for donations. And the coats and blankets arrived. I was blown-away by one woman who arrived in a van that was packed to the ceiling. When she opened her trunk there were at least 10 brand new sleeping bags, 20 new children's coats, 50 plush and thick blankets and throws that she had personally purchased. She wishes to remain anonymous—the highest form of giving.



Coat drive organizer, Kelley Glass, arranges items to give away.

—**Sister Valerie Luckey**

**December 15, 2020:** I was near our volunteers as they greeted Tina, who was coming through our food pantry line on a Tuesday morning. I could hear the exchange begin as Tina exclaimed, with arms raised in the air, "Praise God for joy!" She didn't elaborate as to the source of her joy; she simply declared to us all, "Praise God for joy!" Before she continued onto the food line, she also asked to talk to Rita (Scrimenti), our social worker on staff. She needed some help and knew that she could turn to her.

I hope that our guests find joy knowing we are here for them, whatever their need. —**Catherine Simon**

# For the Record . . .



Members of SONS of Lake Erie prepare the fish fry meal on the food pantry porch.

## SOUP KITCHEN FISH FRY

The SONS of Lake Erie hosted their annual fish fry dinner at the soup kitchen. With fewer members present because of COVID-19, guests still enjoyed plentiful portions of hand-dipped fried fish, chips, and cole slaw on a sunny autumn evening.

## TREE NURSERY AT EMMAUS GROVE

Emmaus Grove provided fertile ground for Sister Pat Lupo and her Neighborhood Art House students as they planted twenty-five saplings in late October. Part of Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier Park (LEAF)'s ReLeaf initiative, these twenty-five trees contributed to the overall goal of planting 275,000 trees in Erie County, the number representing the county's population.

To find out more information about ReLeaf, go to [www.ReLeafErie.org](http://www.ReLeafErie.org).



Rosa Fatica-Showers (right), an Emmaus volunteer and LEAF staff member, teaches an Art House student how to plant a tree.

## ARTSY APRONS

Emmaus was a patron of the Inner City Neighborhood Art House's annual Taste of the Arts fundraiser when it moved online this year, selecting from the "to-go" menu six vibrant ice-dyed aprons for staff and volunteers to wear while serving a daily meal to Erie's hungry. Art House students created the colorful aprons during after-school art classes.



Soup kitchen volunteers (L-R) Rhonda Lewis, Kathie Whipple, and Pam Baumgart don ice-dyed aprons.

# Celebrating Christmas at Emmaus

## CHRISTMAS FOR KIDS CAFE FAMILIES

If Covid-19 made it impossible for Kids Cafe children to attend the annual Christmas store and receive free, wrapped presents for themselves and family members...well, take the store to the children. That's just what Kids Cafe coordinator, Stephanie Gear, along with staff members Ebony King and Irvina Salter, did when they delivered Christmas gifts and other toiletry and food items to families who attend the after-school program.



A Kids Cafe family receives its gifts.

able to see our kids who attend the Kids Cafe, even at a distance, during the holidays was a gift in itself," Stephanie Gear said.

## A CHRISTMAS FEAST AT THE SOUP KITCHEN

The spirit of Christmas joy could be felt, even at a social distance, during Emmaus Soup Kitchen's annual Christmas dinner on December 18th. A special celebration that included stuffed chicken as the dinner entrée, also featured a gift giveaway as the cherry-on-top. Guests received fleece-lined hooded sweatshirts, calendars for the new year, Christmas ornaments, children's blankets for families and even Matchbox cars for kids.



Children receive Matchbox cars with their Christmas meals.

## A TREE GROWS IN EMMAUS

It's not unusual for someone to drop off gifts at the soup kitchen, no name attached. When a bare Christmas tree appeared on the doorstep, I left it there, thinking, "How nice, someone in need will get a free tree."

Lo and behold, I returned the following day to see a guest of ours opening the box and setting it up smack-dab in the center of our lawn. As I left, I wanted to see if the man was still there, to ask him why he decided to set the tree up on an unusually sunny day for a December in Erie. But he was gone. I laughed to myself, smiling at the joy this tree might give to someone else.

My guess is that he understood a truth about the Christmas season: Joy connects us to one another. —Sister Valerie Luckey



## We Remember...

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

Bernadine Maciejewski Arnone  
Gertrude Bretz  
Geraldine E. Carey  
Shirley A. Dudenhofer  
Elizabeth E. "Betty" Farrell  
Mary Catherine Gallagher Fleming  
Wanda Lesnicki Crotty Kowalczyk  
Mary Christine Houghton Loftus  
Mary Ann Nelson  
Evelyn Mancuso Parshall  
Zdzislaw John Raclawski  
Mary Margaret Macko Reed  
John Francis Sebald  
Janet E. (Steiner) Smith (Cake Baker)  
Phyllis Anne Stone  
Barbara L. (Story) Walk

**We also remember Emmaus Volunteers:**

William A. Knowles  
Lynda (Lohse) Madrigale  
Beverly Grab Rosenbaum  
Kathleen Kraus Spiegel  
Clarence J. "Buck" Swahn, Jr.  
Ronald J. Wasielewski

*There is  
only one breath  
between life and death.  
The important thing  
is to make  
every breath count—  
not only for myself  
but for someone else  
as well.*

from  
*A Month of Memories:  
Words of Comfort  
on the Death of a Loved One*  
by Joan Chittister

## We Give Thanks . . .

Let us give thanks for **Gary Horton** for donating chickens to give away to guests...**Amanda Bliss, Kathé Wilson, and Mary Nelson** for donating homemade face masks...**MacDonald Illig staff** for their donation of food and winter items...**Jerry Gorniak** for his donation from Christmas tree sales...**Carly DiFuccia** for donating food from Harbor View restaurant...**Dave Litz, Jr.** for donating food from the Sloppy Duck...Gannon University students **Sammi Valatis, Jacquelyn Giannelli, and Amy Henry** for donating canned goods and making homemade cards for guests...**Rick Liebel** for collecting canned goods and other non-perishables to donate...**Patchwork of Love at St. Mark's Episcopal** for making handmade quilts to give to guests...**The Our Lady of Mount**



Danny Casella (center) and family drop off face masks

**Carmel Prayer Shawl group** for donating handmade blankets and scarves...**Danny Casella and family** for making face masks and toiletry bags to give to children at Kids Cafe...**Dewey Paint** for donating gallons of paint...**Sarah Glennon and friends** for collecting items to put in soup kitchen to-go bags...**Erie Day School** for making Thanksgiving Gratitude bags for the



Girl Scout Troop 52924 with their donations

soup kitchen...**Happy Hatters** for making homemade knitted hats...**Marcia and Dom Frisina** for handmade scarves, hats, and canned items...**St. Jude the Apostle** for their Giving Tree gifts...**Hogs and Honey** for donating sausage...**Tim Holland** for giving 15 Christmas trees...**Blessed Sacrament Girl Scout Troop 52954** for toiletry bags...**Mimi O'Connor and friends** for their annual food donation...**The Mental Health Association, Studio Hue, School House Yoga Studio, The Sunshine Group, Highpoint Towers, Mid City Towers, Richford Arms, Sportsmen's Athletic Club, Vibrant Heat Group, the National Junior Honor Society at Erie Day School, Melanie Shufran and Ralph Edes, Mark and Debbie Woods, Valerie and Chris Greene, and Edna Van Bockern**, who all helped to make the Christmas giveaway for the Kids Cafe possible...for all who donated to holiday meals at the soup kitchen...and to everyone who contributed to Emmaus Ministries during this Christmas season!

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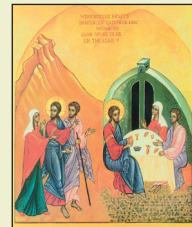


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EMMAUS ICON

Emmaus Icon *Road to Emmaus*

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

Luke 24:35

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