

We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...

Hebrews 12:1

From Sister Mary

Dear Friends of Emmaus,

Every morning I read a periodical called *Give Us This Day* that includes the daily scriptures and a “saint” of the day feature. I love reading about inspiring people and look forward to who will be highlighted. But when I opened the book one day and found “Mrs. Barrett” as the featured “saint,” I was puzzled. Never read about her, saw a statue to her, or recited, “Saint Mrs. Barrett, pray for me.”

Shame on me. Mrs. Barrett was named as one of the ordinary saints, that community of good people who do beautiful deeds each day and rarely get noticed. In this case she was mentioned by Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker, as a woman who gave her “my first impulse toward Catholicism.” In an early memoir that Day wrote, she remembered going as a little girl to her friend Kathryn’s house and finding her friend’s mother, Mrs. Barrett, praying on her knees. That image imprinted itself on Dorothy’s mind as she made her way into faith and revolutionary gospel living.

It made me think of all the Mrs. Barretts that I know and often take for granted. Especially those that surround me at the soup kitchen—guests, volunteers, staff, donors.

So we are taking this issue of *The Companion* to look at all the “Mrs. Barretts” in our life, the ordinary people who inspire us to show up. To be there for others. To be there with those who weep. To be there to celebrate the good things. To be there for the children. To be there for the poor.

One of my Mrs. Barretts is a guy named Jerry Gorniak. For the past 20 years Jerry has walked into the office on the first week of the new year holding a paper bag stuffed with dollar bills. “Here’s your lunch money, Sister Mary,” is his usual greeting. This year it was almost \$500. During the holiday season Jerry sells trees and makes decorative branches available. If a person wants a branch or two to decorate the house or the porch, Jerry gives them away, well...almost. What he does is encourage customers to take a branch and make a donation to Emmaus. “I couldn’t believe how many people asked me this year where your lunch box was,” he told me, beaming like a Christmas tree bulb. Isn’t it something to still be beaming after 20 years of giving away Christmas branches to feed the hungry? And that’s what’s so inspiring—ordinary people like Jerry, people like you, keep showing up, smiling, and of good cheer. How can I do less?



Sister Mary

Blessed are you...

We asked a variety of Emmaus friends,

“What ordinary saint inspires you and why?”



Priscilla Richter

One day when the staff and volunteers arrived at the Food Pantry we found an elderly woman standing outside in the bitter cold and deep snow, waiting for the doors to open...and that was an hour away. Somehow, she had managed to trudge through the snow and ice with a walker, but we could see that she was hungry and weak. Immediately she was ushered into the warm pantry and given food. Then she and her walker and her bags of food were put in one of the staff's cars and she was driven home. This happened when I first started volunteering at the food pantry and I never forgot it. Stopping everything to make sure someone in need is helped seemed like such an ordinary response and yet it was extraordinary. In my year at the pantry, I saw this rare compassion and care shown to guests over and over again. I wasn't inspired by one ordinary saint, I rubbed shoulders with a company of them.

—Priscilla Richter (Priscilla lived for a year with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in their Benedicta Riapp program and volunteered at the Emmaus Food Pantry.)

Many guests at the soup kitchen suffer some form of mental illness and that makes for a potentially volatile situation. We have skilled people circulating among the guests and one of the most qualified is Colleen Hammon who comes twice a week just to “talk” to people in the soup line. It's inspiring for me to see Colleen, who served as Director of Mental Health Services in Erie for 15 years, washing the tables, taking out the trash, telling troubled guests what resources are available to them in Erie and diffusing conflicts when needed. Once a man at the kitchen became verbally angry and she was able to diagnose, on the spot, that he had a cognitive disability that meant he didn't process like the rest. So she knew how to approach him and calm the situation. Most of all, she has encouraged me not to label people with mental illness or stigmatize them but to treat them with respect and dignity. Colleen says she continues to volunteer because “there is a culture of loving kindness at the soup kitchen.” For me, Colleen herself is the embodiment of that loving kindness.

—Breanna Mekuly, Emmaus public relations assistant



Colleen Hammon

Blessed are you...

I've seen a lot of touching encounters at the soup kitchen, but I can't stop thinking about this one. A few weeks ago, Paul, one of our regular guests at the soup kitchen, called Sister Mary over and presented her with an award. Now the award was a used, second-hand certificate of achievement. Our guest had scratched out the name of the original recipient and pasted a card that said “Emmaus Soup Kitchen” over it. It was an award for “kindness” and he wanted Emmaus to receive it because we had been kind to him. He was beaming when he gave her the award. This man was so proud to award Emmaus for doing our work; his understanding of our kindness keeps me going.

—Joan Martter, Emmaus Soup Kitchen volunteer



Sister Mary and Paul



Stephanie and Irvina

Irvin Salter cares for a disabled husband who suffered a stroke. She is also responsible for three children and 12 grandchildren. But she never misses a day of work here at the Kids Cafe or even asks for extra time off. I never hear Irv complain either, even when I ask her to do the extra. She's like the Patron Saint of Jugglers, managing a lot of stuff without missing a beat. Irv doesn't have a lot of material things, but she knows what's important. She told me, “I don't care how I dress or present myself, as long as my family is taken care of.” I look at Irv and then I look in the mirror. If she can handle everything on her plate with such generosity and remain even tempered, how about me? Irv inspires me to embrace my life, do what needs to be done and more, and keep smiling and showing up.

—Stephanie Grear, coordinator of Emmaus's Kids Cafe

Food for the Soul

A COMMENTARY ON THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT
by Joan Chittister

Chapter 35: Kitchen Servers of the Week

“The members should serve one another. Consequently, no members will be excused from kitchen service unless they are sick or engaged in some important business of the monastery, for such service increases reward and fosters love.

—from the Rule of Saint Benedict

Benedict’s claim that the most tedious, most humdrum tasks of everyday “increase reward and foster love,” is a strange and circular promise. After all, there is no glory in such efforts, no sense of much lasting accomplishment either.

But the promise is a real one. The reward comes from a sense of what it means to sustain a system—the community, the family, the needy—that would collapse without us. To know that I have been essential to the well-being of my community is a great and glowing feeling. I have done my job in life. I have existed for someone other than myself. I have spent myself for the sake of others in the simplest, most common, most eternal of ways.

—Joan Chittister



The Emmaus family recently lost two women—much too soon—who were “essential to the well-being” of our small community. Evelyn “Evy” M. Seyboldt volunteered at the soup kitchen every Friday for 25 years and Susan “Sue” Jane Wurst DiCara came every Tuesday for the past 12 years.



Evy Seyboldt



Sue DiCara

Both of these women were unusual examples of ordinary saints who “spent themselves for the sake of others in the simplest, most common, most eternal of ways.”



For the Record

THE PEOPLE'S SUPPER

Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus Ministries, was one of 80 people included in Erie's inaugural The People's Supper, "a national initiative designed to bring diverse groups together through a series of shared meals." "I've never been in a more diverse group of

people committed to the same cause: to making Erie a better and more loving city," she said. Erie Mayor Joe Sember said that the goal of the initiative is to celebrate the rich cultural diversity in the city and to eliminate racism and prejudice. The People's Supper will continue with eight more dinners, enabling the 80 participants to listen to each other's stories and ideas and build relationships.

EXERCISE AND GOOD DEEDS

If the adage, "What you do on New Year's Day, you do all year long," is true, we might all benefit by following the example of bikers who participated in the 7th annual Frigid Frolic. Not only did the 100 cyclists jump start a healthy exercise practice by biking 10 miles around Presque Isle Peninsula, but they also did a good deed by donating winter items to Emmaus Ministries and Community Shelter Services. Getting into a habit of regular exercise and good deeds—is there a better New Year's resolution? "It was a great turnout," said Eric Webber, organizer of the event. "Almost everyone brought a donation and we even got a pair of gloves from a man who couldn't participate this year."



CHILDREN'S PARTY

Christmas is for children. And nowhere is that more evident than at the annual Kids Cafe Christmas Store. Thanks to generous donors, the Kids Cafe staff was able to purchase new gifts and toys for the event. Volunteers arrive on the specified Saturday morning in December to help children shop for one gift for themselves and others for family members and then join them in wrapping their bag of presents and sharing cookies. This year, one eight-year-old boy humbled everyone with his selflessness. "My brother would want this basketball," he told his shopping helper. The volunteer reminded him, "You're

supposed to get a gift for yourself from this table and one for your brother on the side table." But the child persisted, "No, I know it will make my brother happy to get this basketball. I'll get my gift from the side table instead."

FUN FISH FRY

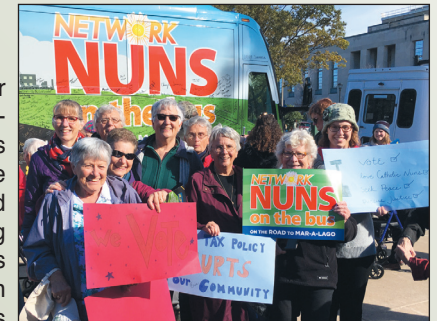
Each year, the SONS (Save Our Native Species) of Lake Erie sponsor and officiate a local walleye fishing tournament on Lake Erie in August and many participants donate all or part of their catch to the soup kitchen.



Then, on a Friday afternoon in September, 20 volunteers, organized by SONS leader Chuck Miller, bring the fish to Emmaus and spend the afternoon cleaning hundreds of walleye and perch and frying them in a special batter. "Our guests really look forward to this banquet," said Margaret Kloecker, associate director. "You can't find a better fish fry in all of Erie." Or a more fun-filled one. Preparing the dinner is always a party-like event with lots of teasing, joking and laughter. "This is why we do this," said Jack Klaphor, a SONS volunteer. "It's so much fun."

NUNS ON THE BUS

If you ask Sister Mary Miller what her hope is for the soup kitchen, she'll answer, "to close it down because it's no longer needed." That's one of the reasons that staff, board members and volunteers of Emmaus were among the 150 people who greeted the Nuns on the Bus when it arrived in Erie in October, 2018. The Nuns on the Bus caravan was traveling through 21 states in 27 days to rally support for affordable health care just before the mid-term elections and to hold members of Congress accountable for their votes. "Expanded affordable health care would go a long way to reducing the number of people who come to soup kitchens," Sister Mary explained. Nuns on the Bus is a part of NETWORK, an organization inspired by Catholic Sisters, that educates, organizes and lobbies for social justice.



Let Us Give Thanks

TIM HOLLAND for Christmas trees; **ST. JUDE PARISH-IONERS** for cookies, **ST. PETER AND PAUL BYZANTINE YOUTH** for cookies and cakes; the **SUNSHINE CLUB** for candy and holiday greetings; **LYNDA PRYOR AND GEARING UP AT HELPING HANDS** for gingerbread houses; **OUR LADY OF PEACE FIRST GRADE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASS** for blessing bags; **ST. GEORGE PRESCHOOL** for blankets; **KATHIE ROTHROCK** for oranges and candy canes; **ERIE INSURANCE** for toiletry bags; **JANE LEVIN'S BOOK CLUB** for toiletry bags; **JANET ADAMS, JUDY BOWEN, AND KATHY HENRY** for scarves and hats; **JAN AND TIM GERLEIN & ST. BONIFACE PARISH** for donations to the Kids Cafe; **KAPPA DELTA PI EDUCATION HONOR SOCIETY AT MERCYHURST UNIVERSITY** for collecting gifts for the Kids Cafe Christmas Store; **ST. STEPHEN'S NURSERY SCHOOL** for toiletries; **ERIE DAY SCHOOL** for bags of gratitude; **TEAM ADRENALINE** for donating food items during their annual charity run; **LITTLE CAESARS** for serving the guests of Emmaus from their Love Kitchen semi-truck; **KFC** for serving meals of chicken, potatoes and gravy at the soup kitchen; **ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH** for hosting a food drive; **KELLEY GLASS, ANDREA HALLMAN, AND ST. JUDE'S PARISH** for hosting the 23rd annual coat drive; **STUDENTS AT ST. JUDE SCHOOL** for donating Halloween candy; **JESSICA HALE AND ST. JOHN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH** for donating Halloween costumes; **ERIE METROPOLITAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY** for raising funds during Customer Appreciation Week; **NAT BURNSIDE AND MAPLE DONUTS** in Lake City for sponsoring Emmaus during the Erie Insurance Golf Tournament.

In a newsletter dedicated to the "ordinary saint" surrounding Emmaus, this letter struck a special chord.

Dear Sr. Mary,
I hope all is well with everyone at Emmaus Ministries. Last year was a very challenging year for my family as I was experiencing problems with my leg and feet which started a year ago. I was eventually diagnosed with a progressive type of MS that has now left me unable to work or drive anymore. By God's love and grace the adjustments that needed to be made to move forward have gone well and hopefully the right medicine will now keep the MS from progressing further. Please accept our gift of \$50 for the soup kitchen and food pantry. May God bless all of you at Emmaus.

F.J

In Memory

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

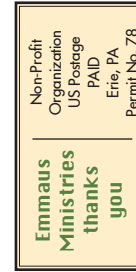
Virginia L. DiDionisio Gannoe Albert
John Martin Cianella
David A. Cologrande
Elayne Ann LoRe Comi
Richard Leonard "Dick" Czerwinski
Jim "Bugsy" Hammond
Timothy McGuire Holland
John F. Kloecker

Helen A. (Wychulis) "Kowalski" Kowalewski
Mary S. Leonardi
Jean Ann Reichert (Braun)
Rudolph Thomas "Tom" Rinke
Margaret Salzman Heberlein Thomas
Rita A. Alexandrowicz Urbaniak
Mary Ann (Young) Weiser
Phyllis A. Zack

We also remember Emmaus Volunteers,

Susan "Sue" Jane Wurst DiCara (Soup Kitchen); **Camille R. Grimaldi Hardner** (Kids Cafe); **Evelyn "Evy" M. Seyboldt** (Soup Kitchen); **Robert Lawrence Theiss** (Food Pantry)

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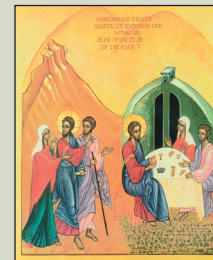
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They came
to know Christ
in the breaking
of the bread.

Luke 24:35



EMMAUS ICON

Emmaus Icon *Road to Emmaus*
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