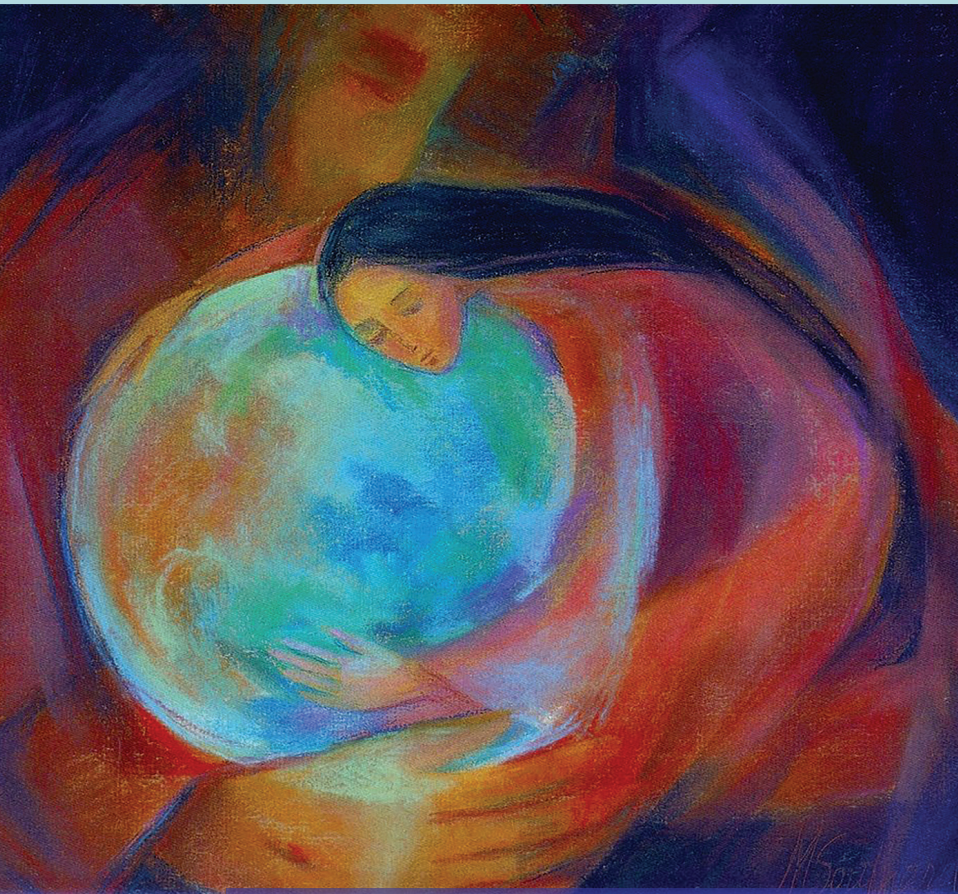




The Companion

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www.emmauserie.org



The Gift of Tears

From Sister Mary . . .

Dear Friends,

Day after day, my work at Emmaus Ministries gives me reasons to weep: sometimes, it's a tragedy that befalls one of our guests or volunteers; sometimes, it's the thought of all the injustices in our society that make it so hard for people to escape the cycle of poverty, abuse, and oppression. I get tired of all these tears, and wonder if all of these experiences are making me a negative person.

But my friend Sister Joan Chittister's essay, "A Time to Weep," gave me a new perspective. She writes:



Sister Mary Miller, Director of Emmaus

Few of us see our weeping as a spiritual gift or a matter of divine design. But we are wrong. If we do not weep on the personal level, we never understand humanity around us. If we do not weep on the public level, we are less than human ourselves.

We must always cope with evil, of course, but we must never adjust to it. We must stay eternally restless for justice, for joy. Restless enough to cry out in pain when the world lacks them.

There are some things about which, if we do not weep, we will betray the human race. It is not healthy, for instance, to say that massive poverty is sad, but 'normal.' On the contrary. To weep over this may be our first real step toward honesty, health, and healing. Weeping, in fact, may be the best indicator of what life is really all about. What we weep for measures what we are.

Without our tears, we have no hope of healing because we do not begin to confront the anguish. The ancients called this 'the gift of tears.' To have this gift is to have the heart to care about what we do to others, and the spirituality that stretches life to its outside edges. Life matters to those who weep.

In this newsletter, you'll find stories of people who wept, and then were moved by their tears to bring some comfort into situations of pain and suffering. I hope it moves you to ask yourself: What makes you weep? And what will you do about it?

In peace,

Sister Mary

The Gift of Tears

Two staff members, Rita Scrimenti and Breanna Mekuly, reflect on the ways their experiences at Emmaus have created the gift of tears.

Rita Scrimenti Social Worker

I put on my coat each morning without a second thought. But, then I come to the soup kitchen and stand outside with our guests in the cold weather. And I know some of them will be outside all night. I give my coat a second thought after that.

Before Christmas, a young teenager asked if we had a winter coat he could use. I've known his family for many years, because they've been guests of the kitchen for a long time, and I know he has had to take on a lot of responsibility for them. I went to look for a coat, and I found a nice, warm, black one just his size. He put it on, stood next to his mom and dad, and exclaimed, "Wow! Now we all have a matching black coat!" It's these things that happen to you night after night. They make you weep. It's just a simple coat, a new coat. It seems like nothing to us, but it's not. I know that this is why Kelley Glass does a coat drive each year at Emmaus.



Rita (left) hands out Christmas gifts at the soup kitchen with volunteers (L-R) Karen Fortebraccio, Pam Baumgart, and Mary Nelson.

A WINTER COAT GIVE-AWAY AT THE FOOD PANTRY

In early November, long-time Emmaus volunteers Kelley Glass and Andrea Hallman, along with many of their friends, gathered at Emmaus to give away dozens of coats, hats, blankets, and other winter items. They have coordinated this annual event for more than 25 years, distributing hundreds of these gifts to food pantry guests. Andrea explained, "Kelley was looking for a way to give back after her father died." When asked what has kept Kelley motivated to continue the coat drive after all these years, she smiled and humbly stated, "If we can help just one person, that's a win."



Photo: Kelley takes a photo of a guest in her new coat.

Photo: Kelley takes a photo of a guest in her new coat.

The Gift of Tears

Breanna Mekuly Kids Cafe Coordinator

A woman who volunteers at the Kids Cafe called me last week and said she had been losing sleep thinking about one of the children. Last time she was here, one of the little girls was having a hard day, hiding in the bathroom and then, when she was convinced to come and join the other kids, she kept the hood of her jacket over her head. Other kids were asking her about it and she finally pulled it off to show us that her hair was completely matted. The volunteer told me she had been a hairstylist for forty years, and cared for rescue dogs, too—the girl's hair was as tangled as the fur of rescue dogs.

The volunteer continued, "It just broke my heart, since I could tell the girl was ashamed, and afraid of being bullied. I asked if I could brush it out for her, and she said yes. It took a while, but I combed out one small part and braided it. I told her, 'If you're feeling sad, you can hold onto this braid here and know that I'm thinking of you and love you.' And all the rest of the afternoon I could see her touching that braid.

What can I do to make sure that these kids get connected with a hairdresser to keep them from having to hide themselves?"



Breanna spends time with the children at the Kids Cafe.



EMMAUS WEEPS FOR THE EARTH

Recognizing the ecological devastation happening now, Emmaus Ministries has divested from fossil fuels as part of the Laudato Si' movement. Based on Pope Francis' 2015 Encyclical, Laudato Si': On

Care for Our Common Home, the movement calls for actions to achieve climate and ecological justice. To learn more, visit: www.laudatosimovement.org.

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. To read more Almanac entries, visit www.emmauserie.org.

February 1: For Catholics, the month of February begins with the Feast of Saint Brigid of Kildare, an abbess and miracle-worker. Legend says that Brigid was always responsive to the needs of the poor; she couldn't hold herself back from giving, even as a little child. One story holds that as a nine-year-old girl, Brigid heard that the local peasants were starving, and gave away her mother's entire store room of butter. When she prayed, the room filled up again immediately. Most of the volunteers at Emmaus have prayed that same kind of prayer as they watch the cold and hungry people of Erie come to Emmaus' door day after day.

February 4: Forty years ago, in February 1982, the *Erie Times* newspaper profiled Emmaus Ministries, which was then eight years old. The article mentioned that Emmaus Ministries would soon host its first-ever benefit—an evening of pizza and live music, with a suggested donation of \$3 per guest. The writer of the piece noted, "Three dollars seems a small price to pay to hear Jesus say, 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat.'"

February 11: "Do you ever see any success stories?" a visitor asks Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB, Emmaus' Women's Advocate. "Oh, all the time," she answers. "Just last week, I heard from a man who said, 'You fed me dinner for months fifteen years ago, and now I'm back on my feet and I'd like to help the next person in line.' There are lots of people like that! Oh, I could write a book."

February 16: The poet Adrienne Rich wrote, "The decision to feed the world is the only real decision." Once you've made that decision, everything looks different, everything looks a bit clearer. It's the decision that guides every other commitment you will make throughout your life.

The Soup Kitchen at its former location on 6th and Parade Streets.



An Emmaus Almanac

February 19: In countries influenced by Chinese culture, February 19th is a day dedicated to Kwan Yin, the Buddhist saint of compassion. She's called "The One Who Hears the Cries of the World." John Daido Looi writes: "One of [her] characteristics ... is that she manifests herself in accord with the circumstances. So she always presents herself in a form that's appropriate to what's going on. In the Bowery, she manifests as a bum ... or as a drunk. Or she might manifest ... as a fireman, or a physician. ... Every time there's a stranded vehicle on the side of the road and a motorist stops to help, [she] has manifested herself." Tonight, you can bet she'll be at Emmaus.

February 20: On the last Sunday before Lent begins, in Luke's Gospel Jesus warns his followers not to focus on the flaws in our brothers and sisters, while overlooking "the beam in our own eyes." The weaknesses in our guests at Emmaus are easy to see: there are material things they lack, and some have obvious struggles with substance abuse or mental illnesses. But we who are in a position to work with and support the guests shouldn't be blind to the ways that we are just like them, just as in need of connection and encouragement.

REMEMBERING SHIRLEY WHALEY

Shirley Whaley, who served as the soup kitchen cook for twelve years before retiring in 2020, died unexpectedly last September. Shirley brightened the lives of volunteers and guests alike. Long-time monthly volunteer Patti Shea shared: "Shirley was one of the nicest people, and she was so capable. She could do absolutely everything in the kitchen and taught us many 'tricks of the trade.' We used to cook and talk about our lives. I loved hearing her talk about her family; she was so proud of her grandchildren." Helen Keller wrote, "What we have



once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us." Shirley and her faithful presence at the soup kitchen will always be a part of Emmaus.

Shirley (center) with Patti Shea's volunteer group.

For the Record . . .

CHRISTMAS DINNER AT THE SOUP KITCHEN



Kathi Lieb adds gravy to the Christmas dinner.

There was a homey atmosphere at the Soup Kitchen Christmas party, even though it was served to-go style to minimize the risk of spreading Covid-19. Volunteers Debbie and Pat Shoup, and Kathi and Tom Lieb, served stuffed chicken breast, salad and rolls, and a special dessert to the guests, who also received warm blankets as a Christmas gift.

An elderly man who had come to the kitchen that night told the woman serving his meal, “I just got a place to live—an apartment with a door and everything. I can move in before Christmas!” He added, “What a gift! I’m going to have a warm blanket to sit under in my apartment.”

THE KIDS CAFE CHRISTMAS STORE

A seven-year-old girl, with pigtails tied up in jingle bells, said she wanted to find something for her mother before she would even look at the children’s toys at the Kids Cafe Christmas Store. Then she proudly carried the heavy set of a matching bath mat and shower curtain herself, letting a volunteer hold the gifts she’d picked out for herself and her siblings.

Every year, the Kids Cafe offers this “Christmas Store,” giving each child in the program a chance to pick out a gift for themselves, and one for each person they live with. Dozens of individuals and local businesses provided gifts, turning a room at the Kids Cafe into a “Santa’s Workshop” that left many kids speechless. Volunteers



A new cosmetic set!

did the wrapping so that every package was beautifully decorated. One volunteer, Charlene Serfozo, personally knitted more than thirty stockings for the children.

Some kids went home with especially exciting things, like new roller skates and glittery nail polish, that they will enjoy for months to come.

Volunteer Mary Ellen Lieb wraps gifts with a child.



For the Record . . .

A NEW TRUCK FOR THE FOOD PANTRY

Thanks to a recent grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Emmaus was able to purchase a 2014 Freightliner truck for the food pantry in November, replacing one which had been in use for nearly a decade. Margaret Kloecker, Administrative Assistant, researched the grant, completed the paperwork, and worked with local companies to find a truck that fit the pantry’s needs. The grant, which was earmarked for necessary equipment for food pantries, also provided a new walk-in freezer.

“I would like to especially thank Tom Birkmire from Crystal Lakes Trucking, who went above and beyond to locate a truck that fit our criteria,” said Margaret. “It’s been a long haul, but we finally have one that will meet our needs well into the future.”

EMMAUS ON THE RADIO

“It’s amazing to think that with all the ups and downs that Covid-19 has brought to so many people and so many organizations, Emmaus hasn’t missed a day of feeding its guests since the beginning of the pandemic,” Emmaus Ministry Assistant, Sister Valerie Luckey, OSB, shared when she was interviewed by Classy 100 radio host, Brenda Savelli for her show, *Brenda in the Morning*.

In the interview, Sister Val talked about each ministry Emmaus offers to the community, as well as the ways that the pandemic has affected the way each ministry operates.

TIM HOLLAND DONATES HOME-GROWN CHRISTMAS TREES

The Food Pantry driveway became a Christmas tree lot for a day in early December. The trees were a gift from Tim Holland, a long-time volunteer and friend of Emmaus, who has been donating Christmas trees from his farm for the past ten years. “It’s just a way to brighten up somebody’s Christmas season,” Tim said.

Tim Holland drops off a dozen trees from his farm.



(L-R) Volunteer and truck driver, Jim Vogt; Food Pantry Coordinator, Catherine Simon; Volunteer and truck driver, Tom Lieb; Margaret Kloecker



We Give Thanks . . .

A special “Thank You” to **Ralph Edes, Melanie Shrufran, and the Shufran family** for over 300 pears, to-go boxes, and food items. . . **SONS of Lake Erie** for hosting their annual fish fry at the soup kitchen. . . **St. Mark and Mount Calvary churches** for homemade hats and scarves. . . **Students at St. Jude School** for 300 pounds of candy on All Saints Day. . . **St. Stephen’s Nursery School** for a Halloween candy donation. . . The **Pre-School class at St. Paul’s Lutheran** for a Thanksgiving food and toiletries drive. . . **Patchwork of Love Quilting Group** for making handmade quilts to give away. . . **Marcia and Dom Frisina** for handmade scarves and hat, as well as making a day’s worth of to-go bags for the soup kitchen. . . **Executool** for taking up a food collection for donation. . . **Sarah Glennon and friends** for organizing a neighborhood food drive benefiting the soup kitchen. . . **Happy**



Second graders from St. Jude’s with candy donations

for making homemade winter items for guests. . . **Students at Erie Day School** for donating the contents of eighty-six hygiene bags for guests. . . **Fulton Athletic Club** for a dozen Christmas hams. . . **The Sunshine Club of Erie** for Christmas cards and pins to give away to guests. . . **The Corporate Claims Department at Erie Insurance** for their collection of peanut butter, jelly, snacks, gloves, and hats. . . **St. Jude Parish** for organizing a Giving Tree for Emmaus. . . **Girl Scout Troop 36383** for collecting peanut butter, jelly, and snacks for the soup kitchen. . . **Students at Cathedral Prep** who participated in a box village to benefit Emmaus. . . **Erie and Americo Federal Credit Union** for donations at Christmastime. . . And **to all who contribute** to make Christmas so special at Emmaus!

Hatters Knitting Group for making homemade winter items for guests. . . **Students at Erie Day School** for donating the contents of eighty-six hygiene bags for guests. . . **Fulton Athletic Club** for a dozen Christmas hams. . . **The Sunshine Club of Erie** for Christmas cards and pins to give away to guests. . . **The Corporate Claims Department at Erie Insurance** for

Emmaus Ministries Remembers

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

Richard T. “Dick” Barczyk
Charlotte Ann Bartlett
William “Bill” James Bell
Edward V. Bolt
Joyce Moses Black Conneely
Frances M. (Baronett) Jefferys
Margaret Ann “Peggy” Kelsey
Marilyn Markham Regnier

Thomas J. Matusiak
William T. McKay, Jr. (Volunteer)
Doris Jean Mitchell Murphy
Jacqueline “Jackie” Ann Presutti
Leo W. “Bud” Schlecht, Jr.
Palla J. Tautin
Mary Alice Wilczynski
Shirley A. Whaley

Emmaus also remembers volunteer Margaret Ann Knight.

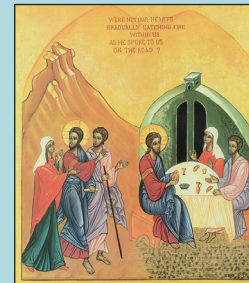
STAFF: Mary Miller, OSB; Margaret Kloecker; Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB; Rita Scrimanti; Breanna Mekuly; Valerie Luckey, OSB; Catherine Simon; Companion Staff: Valerie Luckey, OSB; Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB; Companion Consultant: Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB



345 East Ninth Street • Erie, PA 16503-1107

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EMMAUS ICON
Icon *Road to Emmaus*
Iconographer: Sister Marie-Paul, OSB
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They came to know Christ in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:35

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