



# The Companion

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Emmaus Ministries • 345 East Ninth Street • Erie, PA 16503-1107 • (814) 459-8349  
www.emmauserie.org



Behold,  
I make  
all things  
new.

Revelations 21:5

Cover photo by Art Becker—artbeckerphoto.com

## *FROM SISTER MARY:*

Dear Friends of Emmaus,

I've known Ann Vinca for over 50 years. I've known her as friend, spiritual companion, mother, counselor, administrator, wife. But after she agreed to become coordinator of Emmaus' Kids Cafe 11 years ago, I got to know her in a new way.

When she accepted the job, I told her that I was interested in only three things: are the children fed, are they all safe, are they loved? When she retired recently, I had no doubt that she had done all that, but in a manner as unique as it was sacred.

At the Kids Cafe each child knew they were respected and accepted for who they were. The wall in her office was jammed with pictures of the hundreds of children who came through the doors of the Kids Cafe. How the children loved to find their photo there, to know they mattered to someone. If you went to talk with Mrs. Vinca in her office, she would frequently point to a photo and say, "Oh, how I loved that child." And she meant it. And each child knew it.



Sister Mary and Ann Vinca

She prayed without ceasing for the children and often with them. She handed them rosaries and medals and Blessed Mother statues as reminders that someone was always with them who loved them. They called her their "white grandmother."

She welcomed their parents and grandparents and guardians. She visited them in their homes when there was a problem. During her final week at the Kids Cafe, a mother came by to tell her, "I'm bringing all my children here tomorrow," she said. "You raised all of them, Mrs. Vinca, and they're coming to thank you and say goodbye." And come they did, followed by another Kids Cafe alum, and another and another...

Some of the most remarkable stories took place outside of Kids Cafe hours. Often there would be a knock on the door and a Kids Cafe alum—16,17, 18-years-old—would be standing there hungry, not only for food but for a need to unburden himself. Over a large box of cereal and a gallon of milk, these "dropouts" told her everything. Everything that happened in the streets during the night and why. They shared their confusion, their dreams, their dashed hopes, and their unbearable childhood traumas. She built unbreakable bonds of trust.

Even if they landed in prison, she kept faith...and she kept contact. She insisted they could make a fresh beginning—no matter the deed. She wrote to them and they wrote back. "They are spiritual letters from spiritual people who don't have any

spiritual formation or any spiritual home to support their quest for God,” she told me. “They face enormous challenges every step of the way and yet I know that God is very near to them...it is almost palpable.”

Ann shared with me parts of letters that she received when they were in prison:

“I apologize for never writing to thank you—you never judged me—I didn’t know how to thank you or show appreciation.”

“God took some of my time away so I could think and get my life straightened out...thanks for taking two minutes to read this and listen to me again.”

“I got the book you sent—thank you—I’ve been praying every night. It’s easy to pray in here, but when I get out of here, it’s hard.”

“Can’t tell you how much I appreciate your listening to me. I pray every day that God will open my eyes.”

“I ask God to make things work out—I love you.”

Yes, Mrs. Vinca, you fed the children, you kept them safe and you loved them. But you did it in a godlike way. You showed us the face of God who promises, “Behold, I make all things new.”

*Sister Mary*

## REMEMBERING MRS. VINCA:



Kimmie

I could always talk to Mrs. Vinca. If I had a fight with someone, she taught me how to deal with it. Mrs. Vinca, I love you. Be safe. Remember me.

—Kimmie, age 11

I know she’ll live to be 100 and then I’ll thank her—when I’m famous.

—Tijon, age 11



Wilson

Patient is the word.

She told me to be patient when I first came to the Kids Cafe. I was nervous and I sat down with her in her office and she told me to give it (Kids Cafe) a try and see if I liked it a little bit more each day. She wanted to know how I was doing each day.

—Wilson, age 15

She always gave us more chances when we did something you shouldn’t do. —Tay Tay, age 11



Tay Tay

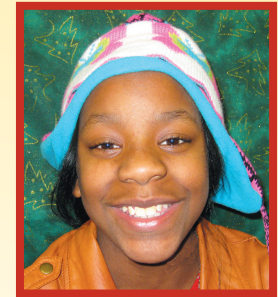
She was a grandma to me. I also like having my picture taken with her. She will be missed. Tell her to call me. —Marquel, age 14



Tyzan

I have known her since I was five years old. She was a grandma to me. She trusted me a lot to do things here. She is the coolest person. I hope she will come back to see us.

—Tyzan, 17



Jeraia

My word is “caring.” She took care of us. —Shy, age 10

My word is “faithful.” She never upset us. If I was upset, she would fix the problem and make me smile.

—Jeraia, 12

## FACE TO FACE: WHAT’S NEW WITH YOU? WHAT’S GIVING YOU NEW LIFE?

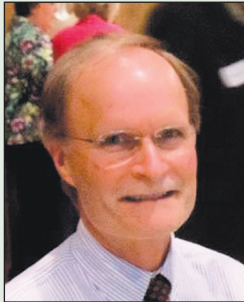


**STEPHANIE TAYLOR, Kids Cafe Coordinator**

I am transitioning to my new position at Kids Cafe. I am joining a talented staff. I am also acquiring the Cafe full of bright and gifted children that I am looking forward to working with for years to come. I am also in the market for some new shoes because, with the retirement of Ann Vinca, I have some big shoes to fill.

**Ed Note: Stephanie Taylor, the new coordinator of Kids Cafe, was Executive Director of Erie County C.A.S.A. (Court Appointed Special Advocates).**

***What's new with you? What's giving you new life?***



**JOHN KATHMAN, Kids Cafe Volunteer**

When I retired three years ago, I was not sure what to do. I was looking for something challenging like being a mentor. I was an operations executive and taught leadership skills to help people get ahead in their careers. So I decided on mentoring children and came to the Kids Cafe with my wife, Becky. We volunteer together. It's all still new to me. It's a whole new perspective for me—to only solve today's problems, to make sure that today is a day when the children receive care and attention. So, I am stretching and growing over shooting a game of pool and helping a child with her homework. The children also tell Becky and me that they like seeing us together, that we're at the Kids Cafe together.

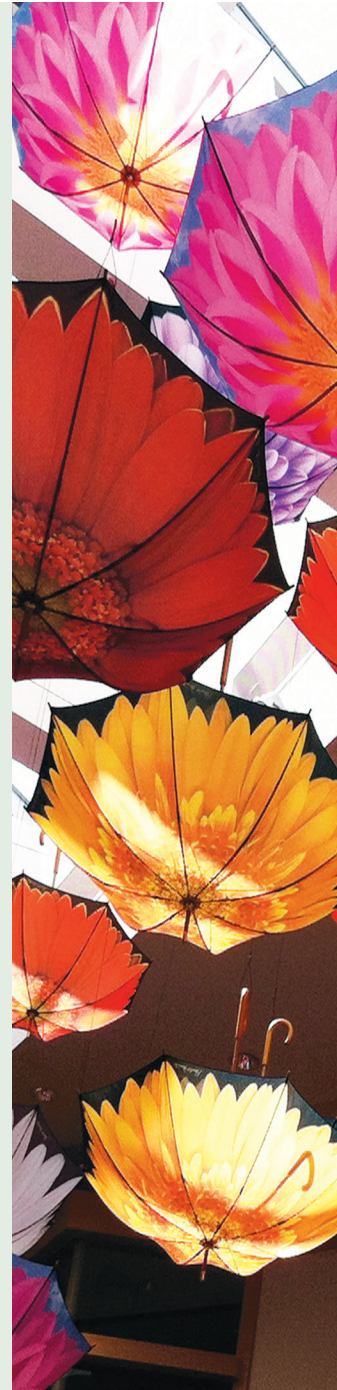
**GEORGE MERMIS, Soup Kitchen Volunteer**

I am looking forward to planting my garden. It is a good size garden, 20 X 40 and I grow many vegetables. The garden gives me hope, like the message of the Easter holiday. Working in the garden lets me enjoy the beauty of springtime, too. I like learning new ways of gardening--like growing my squash on the fence, the vines grow up along the fence and are easier to care for. I also plant flowers and tend to my fruit trees. My son and I work the garden together. I want him to learn from me. It is a blessing for me to see something grow--something you have created. Then, I share what I have created with my family and my friends. Gardening—I love it.



**NANCY SARNOWSKI, Soup Kitchen Volunteer**

Although it's almost two years old, my business, "Jitters Coffee & Bake Shoppe" is still new and renewing for me. When I retired after thirty-five years of teaching home economics, I was not planning on doing anything, let alone opening a coffee shop and bakery. One day I was offering to make scones for the prior owner and the next thing I knew I was buying the place. The experience is ever unfolding and I love coming to work to see what will happen next. I feel a sense of community here with my customers and the groups that meet for coffee and sweets. My daughter, Lee Ann, says "Jitters" is just another big classroom. Maybe so. All I know is that I miss the place when I'm not here.



***Food for the Soul...***

*For, lo, the winter is past,  
the rain is over and gone;  
the flowers appear  
on the earth;  
the time of the singing  
of birds is come,  
and the voice  
of the turtledove  
is heard in our land.*

Song of Songs 2:11-12

## FOR the RECORD: CELEBRATING THE “NEW”



**A NEW IDEA:** Twenty-six adults and children massacred in Newton, CT. Planted explosions at the Boston Marathon killing three and injuring 180. On and on. What can one person do to stop from getting paralyzed by this senseless violence? **Cheryl Bough** of Fremont, CA has joined with others across the country in doing monthly random acts of goodness to combat evil. Each month Cheryl performs a kind action for someone or sends a donation to a needy person or nonprofit along with a note that explains why she is doing it. Emmaus was a recent recipient and her note read: “How do you fight evil? You fight evil with good. This act of kindness is in memory of my friend, Joe, who was pure gift to so many, especially the poor, the forgotten, and the “least of these.” Please use this gift for one person who needs a warm coat, new shoes, or a sleeping bag.”



**A NEW FUNDRAISER:** Imagine a trolley packed with food arriving at your front door. That’s what happened to Emmaus due to a new fundraiser organized by the **Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority and Members of ATU Local 568**. For six weeks, bus and LIFT drivers collected canned goods and nonperishable items from patrons using public transportation throughout Erie country. And on March 22, a trolley overflowing with food was delivered—the single largest food drive

ever done for Emmaus. “This was especially touching because so many of those using public transportation are themselves struggling to make ends meet,” said Margaret Kloecker, administrative assistant, Emmaus Ministries.

**A NEW PROGRAM:** Is there anything better than a new idea? **Sister Miriam Mashank**, former director of Saint Benedict Education Center had one (one of many by the way)—how about Emmaus Works, a job readiness program at the Soup Kitchen? Assisted by a group of volunteers experienced in job search efforts, Sister Miriam set up shop at the food party in May to offer a triage of individual services geared to connect Emmaus job seekers and employment opportunities. “Many of our guests are unemployed and underemployed,” said Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus. “Others need training and education to compete in the job market. Emmaus Works is an exciting and fresh start for our guests.”



**A NEW OUTREACH:** Here’s a sad fact: many guests walking through the soup kitchen door are veterans. They carry untreated combat wounds of the soul that make it difficult to lead normal lives. So it was good news when the **Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center** contacted Emmaus with an initiative to assist with housing needs. Representatives of the Veteran’s Homeless Care Outreach program come to Emmaus a couple times a month to meet with veterans and help them find permanent housing and alert them to other services available in the area.



**A NEW DONOR:** Like many 10-year-olds, **Elise Rinke** watches the Disney Channel for fun. But the channel’s feature spots of children helping people, communities, and the planet, also inspired her. “People do good things and I wanted to do something good too!” said Rinke who attends Belle Valley Elementary School. So to celebrate a recent birthday,



she planned a sleepover and, instead of presents, asked her friends to bring a donation for Emmaus Soup Kitchen. “This child is as beautiful inside as she is on the outside,” said Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus. “She inspires me.”



Members of the **Jewish Community Council** delivered a donation to Sister Mary Miller who welcomed the Council as a new friend of Emmaus Ministries. Pictured L to R: Rita Scrimenti, Ministries Assistant, Walter Harf, Sister Mary Miller, Lyman Cohen, Jan Mandel and Jack Marcus.

**NEW LIFE:** Who doesn’t like an Easter basket? Or in the case of Emmaus—an Easter bag. A colorfully decorated bag filled with chocolate candies, jelly beans and marshmallow peeps greeted each of the 215 guests—a record number—who celebrated the annual Easter dinner at Emmaus on Holy Thursday. In addition to the Easter bags, prepared by **Sisters in assisted living at the infirmary at Mount Saint Benedict**, guests were treated to a full-course meal and a special dessert of Easter cakes donated by **Saint Jude Parishioners**.



“I asked the retired sisters to help with the candy bags Blessing Easter food at Emmaus because I know how much they support our work at Emmaus,” said Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, Emmaus Women’s Advocate. “They were thrilled.”

## In Memory

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



Armand J. "A.J." Comi  
Margaret E. "Marge" Conyngham  
Mary E. Kennedy Haglund  
Kenneth John Jakubowski  
Carol Anne Pella  
Gerald R. Sargent  
Carol Ann (Breter) Sedney



VISIT the **NEW EMMAUS WEBSITE**  
[www.emmauserie.org](http://www.emmauserie.org)

- Read Emmaus news stories as they happen.
- Visit the Soup Kitchen, Kids Cafe, Food Pantry
- Meet Emmaus volunteers
- Pray with Emmaus
- Find ways to help the hungry of Erie

The well-fed person  
and the hungry one  
do not see the same thing  
when they look upon  
a loaf of bread.  
—Rumi—



STAFF: Mary Miller, OSB; Margaret Kloecker; Claire Marie Surmik, OSB; Lucia Surmik, OSB  
Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB; Stephanie Taylor; Rita Scrimemi; Shirley Whaley  
Companion Editor, Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB; Layout, Judy Allison

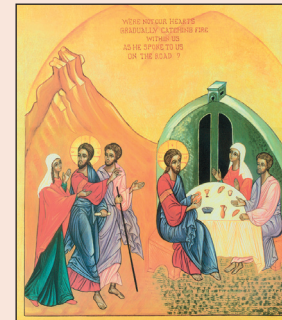


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They came  
to know Him  
in the breaking  
of the bread.

Luke 24:35