



The Companion

February 2020
Vol. 30 No.1

www.emmauserie.org

*"The greatest challenge of the day is:
how to bring about
a revolution of
the heart. A revolution
each one of us."
- Dorothy Day*



From Sister Mary . . .

On revolution of the heart

Dear Friends of Emmaus,

I've always been challenged by the Dorothy Day quote that graces the cover of this newsletter. And I agree with her that what's most needed today is "a revolution of the heart." A revolution that must begin with each one of us.

But what fuels a revolution to love without boundaries? How do you form a God-like heart that is all embracing and does no harm to humans, to nature, to ourselves?

Dorothy Day herself believed that to have a revolution of the heart it was necessary to stay close to the suffering. That's why she opened soup kitchens and hospitality houses and lived among the poor. It's why she marched and was jailed for women's suffrage, workers' rights, and an end to racism and war.



As I was preparing this letter, I asked myself, "What changed my heart?" What began a revolution inside of me? Then I remembered an encounter with a guest at the soup kitchen that helped me see how stone-like my own heart really was. It took place during my first week as director of Emmaus, almost 40 years ago, so you understand what an impact it had on me. The soup kitchen then was on 6th and Parade and it didn't have an outdoor ramp. A guest came to me and asked if he could take some extra food home to his wife because she was in a wheelchair. I jumped to judgement and said, "No, that's not our policy." What I was thinking but didn't say aloud was, "Who are you trying to fool? You just want more for yourself." So, I refused him. A few days later I saw him pushing a woman in a wheelchair down State Street.

It was a life changing lesson for me. Dorothy Day was right. If you desire a revolution of the heart, stay close to the poor and suffering. They will force you to face your prejudices, assumptions, and lies that you tell yourself about how "good" you are. Then the choice is yours. You can flinch and try to flee. Or you can begin a revolution of your heart.

Sister Mary

We Need a Revolution of the Heart

—from the Staff

... and Let It Begin with Me:

I recently returned from a week at the US/Mexico border, ministering with a Benedictine Sister who works there housing migrants and organizing donations. Almost daily we crossed the border to go into Mexico. We delivered toys to orphanages, diapers to a home for people with disabilities, and food to soup kitchens. I was taken aback; here we were delivering items to those in need, and yet, they were serving those with even less. My heart immediately recognized the gospel in front of me: the widow offering her only two coins. My heart called me to be more honest about the ways I can give from my entire livelihood.

—Valerie Luckey, OSB, staff

... and Let It Begin with Me:

How the children at the Kids Cafe look forward to the annual Christmas Store. On a Saturday morning in December they get to go shopping at the Cafe which



Volunteers wrap presents for children at the Kids Cafe.

overflows with brand new items. Each child selects a gift for themselves and for each member of their family, gets it wrapped and tagged, and enjoys hot chocolate and homemade cookies. So many individuals donate gifts and volunteer at the event. I've come every year and it's always a touching scene, but the story that forever changed my heart happened the first year. A six-year-old boy picked out a few items and a handful of pencils and asked volunteers to wrap each pencil individually and put a tag on it with his name. A volunteer asked him why he wanted all those pencils individually wrapped if he already knew what they were. "So I have things to unwrap on Christmas morning," the little boy said.

—Margaret Kloecker, Administrative Assistant

We Need a Revolution of the Heart

... and Let It Begin with Me:

While out walking, I met a woman who frequents our soup kitchen and food pantry with her children. "I just got a job!" she told me excitedly. But then quickly added, "But I'm really worried. My kids and I are hungry. When I got my job, we immediately lost half our food stamps and with my new job, I can't make it to the food pantry anymore because I work during that time." I reassured her that we could make something work out to get her family the food they rely on each week to get by. But she still held concerns: "Because we lost the food stamps, we need to re-budget everything. I'm not sure we're going to make it. I don't mind going hungry – I've trained myself to just eat one meal a day. But my children... how do I tell my three- and five-year-old kids that they have to go without for a bit longer when they look in the cupboards and find nothing?" She called me to examine my own life: the extra food I have in my cabinets that I can turn to whenever I want a snack, that I've never eaten just one meal a day, that I don't have to choose this week if I should go to work or get food for my family....She reminded me why I continue serving at the soup kitchen, and forced me to consider what my role in society is to change policies that would relieve the burdens of women like her.

—Breanna Mekuly, staff

A Revolution That Must Start with Each One Of Us

... and Let It Begin with Me:

Often, we view the poor as a faceless and invisible entity. Seldom do we "see" them as individuals who have families, stories, and hopes that are like our own. Mostly that happens because we don't know a poor person. So it's easy to "give" to the poor and yet not be able to call one poor person by name.

At the annual Emmaus Coat Drive, staff member Breanna Mekuly saw an opportunity



A personal shopper assisting a guest

A Revolution That Must Start with Each One of Us

to make a dent in that reality and she took it. “We had a wonderful abundance of volunteers,” said Breanna, “so we split up tasks. Some committed themselves to reorganizing clothing items while others became personal shopping assistants. As guests entered the dining room, a volunteer greeted them individually and then proceeded to show them around our ‘store,’ asking questions about needs and interests in order to better help the guest find what they needed to stay warm this winter.”

Emmaus staff member, Rita Scrimenti, praised the one-on-one accompaniment as a way to change the hearts of both giver and receiver – the giver recognizes a common humanity and the receiver has her or his dignity affirmed. Dozens of carloads of warm clothing items, donated by parishioners of St. Jude, St. Patrick, and St. Julia’s parishes, were organized for the 24th year by Kelley Glass and Andrea Hallman.

... and Let It Begin with Me:

Gannon University women’s basketball players weren’t the only ones competing at the “Serve Game” on Saturday, January 11th in Erie. Students from local Catholic elementary schools and local Erie “celebrities” competed with one another—all for the benefit of Sister Gus’ Kids Cafe and the Neighborhood Art House.

Cleve Wright, the head coach of the women’s basketball team at Gannon University, proposed an idea to Erie Catholic Schools to join with the basketball players to become aware of the needs in our own community, fight youth poverty, and teach the lesson to students that we are called to serve one another. Students



The Serve halftime game

at six Catholic schools—Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Peace, St. George, St. Luke, St. James, and St. Jude—collected over 30,000 items to give to families in need.

The event culminated in the group of local celebrities, including Mayor Joe Schember, WNBA star Kayla McBride, Erie Catholic Schools president Damon Finazzo, Erie sports-writer Jay Puskar, and Benedictine Sister Katherine Horan, OSB, competing in a ten-minute game during halftime to raise funds for both ministries.

“I think the area of greatest impact for the kids was the visual of quantities of each item. As the donated items increased, they were amazed and pondered the reality that there could actually be that many students their own age who do not have the basic things they so often take for granted... things like toothpaste and socks,” said Sr. Katherine Horan, principal at St. Jude School.

One of the best ways to begin a revolution of the heart is to start with the youngest among us.



St. Luke students help to load donations for the Kids Cafe and Art House onto the Emmaus truck.



Students at St. Jude School gather donations.

... and Let It Begin with Me:

“It was one of those convergence moments,” said Susan Drabant, after watching a group of children climb through a pile of snow in their tennis shoes. “One of the young girls, upon lifting her foot, was no longer wearing her shoe.” She knew she both needed and wanted to do something to help. Since then, she has been collecting money, along with her golf team, the Overlake Nine Hole Ladies League, and coordinating the purchase of boots to give to local children. They donated 20 pairs of new children’s boots to Emmaus this Christmas.

Susan Drabant and Emmaus staff member, Sister Valerie Luckey



A Revolution That Must Start with Each One Of Us

... and Let It Begin with Me:

Dorothy Day must have had Barb Esper in mind when she talked about a revolution of the heart. It would be enough that each month Barb organizes her parish - Assumption Greek Orthodox Church - to prepare and serve a gourmet meal. But this Christmas, under her direction, church members collected, sorted, and organized 250 tote bags for guests at the soup kitchen. Even the parish youth got involved, preparing special bags for children at the soup kitchen. "Originally we planned to only donate blankets but we got those quickly and people wanted to keep donating," she said. That's how a revolution of the heart looks.



Parishioners of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church with Christmas tote bag donations

... and Let It Begin with Me:

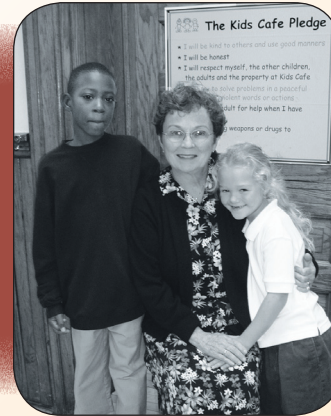
Even corporations can participate in a revolution of the heart. Toward the end of last year, Little Caesars' Love Kitchen visited the soup kitchen and brought ninety freshly baked pizzas to guests of Emmaus and on another day, Kentucky Fried Chicken sent 250 warm, individually boxed meals. "Cooking is love made visible," someone wrote. Amen.



Little Caesar with a guest of the kitchen

For the Record . . .

Then — 20th Anniversary of Kids Cafe — Now



NEW STAFF MEMBER



Valerie Luckey, OSB, is the newest staff member at Emmaus Ministries. Born and raised in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, working at Emmaus seems fitting. A Scholastic in first vows in the Erie Benedictine community, Sister Valerie taught fourth grade before entering the community. She loves cooking, nature, and poetry.

SHARING THE MESSAGE

One of the core values of Mercyhurst University is "Being Socially Merciful." It means to uphold the dignity of every person and to reach out compassionately to those in need. Cindy and Breanna's presentation on the Emmaus Soup Kitchen, its clients in particular, truly helps my students learn what this core value means and how to practice it. I highly recommend them as guest speakers.
Mary Hembrow Snyder, Ph.D., Theology Professor

If you are interested in having a speaker from Emmaus share information with your book club, parish, service organization, classroom, or other group, please call 814-459-8349.



Breanna Mekuly of Emmaus and Cindy Liotta spoke to Mercyhurst University students on the topic of Food Insecurity.

We Give Thanks . . .

Boetger and Associates for collecting food and supplies for Emmaus... **MacDonald Illig staff** for their annual food donation to Emmaus... **Happy Hatters** for knitting 60 hats to keep the guests of Emmaus warm... the **SONS of Lake Erie** for donating and preparing over 120 pounds of fresh fish for guests of the Soup Kitchen... **ServErie** for doing a deep fall cleaning at the Soup Kitchen... **Nat Burnside** and the **Maple Donuts** golf team who chose Emmaus as their charity when they played in the Erie Insurance Charity Challenge Golf Tournament... folks at **Meals on Wheels** and **Subaru** for donating soup to Emmaus during their national “Share the Love” event... student **Nathan Gonser** and the **student council at St. Luke’s School** for donating Halloween candy... **Edna Siegel** and the customers of **Panache Salon** for donating food items... **AmeriHealth Caritas PA** for sponsoring and **Plantscape Greenhouses** for decorating a Christmas tree in honor of Emmaus Ministries at the Festival of Trees celebration... **Pinkberry Frozen Yogurt** in the West Erie Plaza for donating the proceeds from their grand opening... **Tim Holland** for donating Christmas trees to the guests of Emmaus... **Jake Lipman** and his family for baking cookies... **Erie Youth Hockey League** for hosting a food drive for Emmaus during their Annual Christmas Eve Skate... **Jerry Gorniak** for collecting donations for Emmaus during his annual Christmas tree sale... the **Cyclepaths** for collecting warm weather clothing during their annual New Year’s Day bike ride around Presque Isle... **Parker Autoclave Engineers** for donating a new basketball hoop to the Kids Cafe... and **Mercyhurst University Education Department, GEER GE retirees, Edna and David Van Bockern, the Sportsman’s Athletic Club, Debbie and Mark Woods, Melanie Shufren, Betty and Bill Filipkowski, Our Lady of Peace first graders, Erie Day School, Trellis, Studio Hue, residents of Mid City Towers and Richford Arms, Vibrant Health, as well as the dozens of volunteers** for making this year’s Christmas store at the Kids Cafe possible.

In Memory

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

Mary Edna Pinzok Burbules
Edward J. Gallagher
Dolores Kostek Jagodzinski
Rita A. Kennerknecht
Winifred F. “Winnie” (Moser) Kerstetter
Mary F. (Crowe) Kunik
Casimir T. “Casey” Laniewicz
Evelyn Marie Nesterick

Charles William “Bill” Rosenquest
John C. Schwab
Frances Grygo Somolani
Monica L. Sorensen
Bonnie Lee (Jorgensen) Tullio
Patricia DeCara Tullio
Robert D. Walker
Thomas J. Zipperi, Sr.

STAFF: Mary Miller, OSB; Margaret Kloecker; Claire Marie Surmik, OSB; Lucia Surmik, OSB; Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB; Rita Scrimenti; Shirley Whaley; Stephanie Grear; Breanna Mekuly; and Valerie Luckey, OSB; Companion Editor, Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB; Layout, Judy Allison

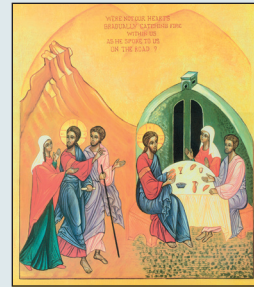


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EMMAUS ICON
Icon *Road to Emmaus*
Iconographer: Sister Marie-Paul, OSB
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They came to know Christ in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:35