

From Sister Mary

Dear Friends of Emmaus,

I always loved the fact that when Mary Magdalene saw a man by the empty tomb on Easter morning, she mistook the risen Christ for a gardener. Mary's mistake might be one of the best metaphors we have of Jesus. Why? Because gardeners are all about beauty and new life. Gardeners know that if you want anything to grow you have to get your hands dirty. Gardeners trust that from the tiniest seed, buried in the dark, a thing of beauty emerges—they hold fast to possibility. Gardeners are awed by the smallest growth. Truly, a gardener is my image of Jesus.



I've spoken in this column before of my love for gardens and flowers, especially the passion flowers that grow right outside the soup kitchen. When I hold one in my hand, I realize that no matter where I hold it, or from what direction I look at it, there is always a surprise. Each angle is different, yet each angle is beautiful.

I feel the same way when I look around the soup kitchen and the pantry and the Kids Cafe. I see a colorful and unique flower garden. Like flowers, some of our guests need more time and care, others just bloom as they see fit. And when I take time with each person, with each precious flower, the wonder of it is sometimes shocking. Just the other day, I had to have a serious conversation with a young man whom I've tossed out of the kitchen a few times for vulgarity and fighting. I didn't much care for him. But when he asked to see me recently, I felt like I was holding a damaged flower that was reaching desperately for a chance to grow. He had admitted himself to rehab and got clean, he moved off the streets and into his own apartment, he attends Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings. He was different and I experienced a change of heart. Who am I to write anyone off? Pray the good God never writes me off.

To me a garden is a very spiritual place. It engages all my senses, fills me with wonder and joy, and reminds me that transformation is both work and mystery. In this issue of The Companion, I invite you into the Emmaus flower garden. Walk carefully, celebrate the varied, enjoy the colorful...and take a flower or two home with you.

Sister Mary



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*She mistook him
for a gardener.*

John 24:14-15



DANDELION

EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK in the soup kitchen you'll see dandelions. Yes, a dandelion is a weed, but it looks like a flower. For one thing, dandelions grow everywhere and you can't get rid of them. Just like the poor. People try to get rid of the poor who walk State Street all day or panhandle in front of neighborhood stores or entrances to the mall, but to no avail. One thing Jesus knew for sure, "the poor you will always have with you." Or to paraphrase, "the dandelions you will always have with you." But here's the thing, dandelions are resilient with strong

deep roots; they can withstand anything. Adele was a dandelion in the soup kitchen garden. She walked the streets most of her adult life, rode the carousel in and out of mental health hospitals, but managed to survive...and to survive with a flair, always decked out in her hand sewn sequined slacks and strutting the avenue like the doctor's daughter that she was.



Mark

FOR THE BUDDHIST, the lotus is the sign of enlightenment because it grows in muddy water yet blooms into beauty each day. Emmaus is filled with lotus flower people whose roots are like mud, so dark with suffering and tragedy and addictions. You listen to the stories and can't imagine yourself in their shoes and you wonder what motivates them to even get out of bed in the morning. But if you're lucky, once in a

while, you might catch a glimpse of their pure goodness—one lotus petal opening. Take our dear Mark who got his life turned upside down by some trauma and is now homeless. Yet every day he offers to clean the dining room and when he's unable he lets us know that he can't make his "shift."

THE VIBRANT COSMOS symbolizes peace and wholeness. And to find a bouquet of cosmos visit the new dance class for girls at the Kids Cafe taught by Danielle Kownacki. "Pre-teen and teenage girls are self-conscious, they are very particular about what they do



LOTUS



COSMOS

and they bore easily," explained Stephanie Grear, Kids Cafe coordinator. "But when the girls are at dance they are able to be who they want to be without being made fun of. Ten-year-old Tira explains, "I can just be myself and not worry about anything. Sometimes when I'm dancing, I imagine I'm on a cloud, just floating in the air. It helps calm me down when I think about things that happened in the past." Like Tira, eleven-year-old Anna said she started using what she's learned in dance to handle her emotions when she is in school or at home. "If I'm mad, I sing. If I'm happy, I dance a lot. And if I'm sad," she said, "I just dance to no music. It makes me feel more relaxed."



Dance class at the Kids Cafe

NOW AND THEN A ROSE IN BLOOM can take your breath away with its beauty. Evelyn Seyboldt was such a rose for many people.

Evy volunteered at Connecting Hands and Emmaus Soup Kitchen for 25 years, up until her unexpected death in January of this year. To honor Evy, Connecting Hands, a group of local volunteers who support area nonprofit organizations by hosting fundraisers, participated in, what they called, "random acts of kindness." Among the "acts" for Evy that took place around Erie were: giving a hairdresser an "extra big tip;" baking desserts for neighbors, folks at the nursing home, and children at the soup kitchen; sending thinking-of-you cards to old friends; helping neighbors clean up their yards for spring; putting a bottle of laundry detergent and a bag of quarters at the laundromat for someone to find; and even paying for strangers' meals at different restaurants around town—including a meal for a family of five.



ROSE

"The community of Emmaus greatly benefited from Evy's kind service," said Sister Mary Miller, "and it's wonderful to see her legacy continued for months after her passing in these acts of kindness."



Evy Seyboldt with a guest at the soup kitchen



Mike Bailey, center, with volunteers from ServErie at Emmaus Grove



JOHNNY-JUMP-UP

YOU NEVER KNOW where a johnny-jump-up will appear next. These wild pansies “jump” from

spot to spot depending on where the wind blows. You have a bare patch of ground one day. The next day it’s filled with purple and yellow and pink flowers. ServErie is like that. This local non-profit pops up everywhere in the city, mobilizing hundreds of volunteers to do good work and make dry deserts bloom. This spring they appeared at Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School. Under the direction of Matt Dzuricky, eight volunteers pulled out over 20 old garden beds and built new ones, preparing the garden for the growing season. “When I found out that Emmaus Grove was my project, I contacted Mike Bailey, one of the master gardeners there, to see what was needed,” explained Matt. “Mike showed me the garden and we even planted tomatoes and peppers together so by the time the event came, I was knowledgeable enough to lead the group.” Though it was his first experience with gardens, Matt, who recently retired from the military, finds that the work helps him “slow down, think, and get through some anxiety.”



DAISY

INNOCENCE AND PURITY OF HEART is what the daisy symbolizes, and you see those qualities in most children. Take the students at St. Jude Catholic School who were challenged by the gospel story of the multiplication of loaves and fishes. “Jesus fed 5,000 people. Can we?” they asked themselves. And then went about doing it. The second graders figured out the math—how many individual servings per peanut butter and jelly jar. Then, given that number, how many jars needed to feed 5,000. In a three-week blitz, they chanted “peanut

butter jelly time” three times a week over the school loudspeaker. Giant cardboard peanut butter and jelly posters and progress graphs dotted the hallways. Students wearing shirts that said “Jesus’ peanut butter disciple” or “Jesus’ jelly disciple” collected the food from the classrooms. Then they fed the 5,000, delivering 300 jars of peanut butter and jelly to the soup kitchen.

— The Emmaus Flower Garden —

Food for the Soul



“Where flowers bloom, so does hope.”

Lady Bird Johnson



For the Record

EASTER AT EMMAUS

Over forty Easter baskets and 200 bags filled with Easter candy were donated and prepared for the Easter soup kitchen celebrations. The Easter baskets—14 of which were specifically for children—came from students at Erie Day School along with the sorority Alpha Eta Master chapter of Beta Sigma Phi in Erie.



Erie Day School student council

A week before Easter, six volunteers prepared decorations for the holiday dinner and rolled utensils in Easter-themed napkins while another group assembled bags of candy.



Volunteers prep for the Easter dinner

The festive dinner, celebrated at the soup kitchen on Holy Thursday, included ham, cheesy potatoes, salad, candy, and various desserts: homemade Easter bunny cookies from Joe Orinko, cupcakes baked by Caitlin Sniezek and Easter cake donated by Renie Louis. Guests were thrilled—one even expressed her gratitude by hand drawing springtime pictures for the staff.



Caitlin Sniezek

ROMOLO CHOCOLATES

Two hundred guests of Emmaus Soup Kitchen enjoyed fresh chocolate and Peeps this Easter season, courtesy of Romolos Chocolates in Erie.



Sister Karen Oprenchok, Emmaus staff member, with Tony Stefanelli

Owner and master confectioner, Tony Stefanelli, has been making chocolates with his family since he was a child. “I’ve tried doing a lot of different things in my life but I’ve always loved making chocolate. It’s part of who I am.”

Also a part of who he is: generous. As head of Romolos, Tony donated 200 chocolate bunnies and 400 Peeps to the guests of Emmaus. “We try to be aware of the needs of our community,” said Tony. “And if we can do something to help, that’s what’s important.”

OUTREACH DAY

Emmaus Soup Kitchen received an intense four-hour cleaning thanks to 13 students from Villa Maria Academy who chose the kitchen during the school’s annual service day. And by intense, we mean they scrubbed tables, chairs, windows, walls,

fans, and even bathrooms.

Some students also helped prepare the meal for the dinner by cutting up vegetables and preparing the chicken casserole.

The young women chose to serve at Emmaus on their Outreach Day with the intent to “have an impact on a local nonprofit,” as

senior Gabby explained. Her friend Jessica chimed in, “We want to assist the food kitchen in serving people in our area who need meals. And if cleaning is how we can help, we’ll clean!”

In total, about 700 students from Prep and Villa were out in the community volunteering on Outreach Day. What was special about serving at Emmaus? “I like how it’s decorated,” said senior Kelly, “I like the flowers and the pictures on the walls. It’s very homey.”



Villa Maria students with teacher, Jennifer Kuntz, front left

POEM IN YOUR POCKET DAY

Guests at the soup kitchen are used to getting a hot meal, a cup of coffee, and a sweet dessert. But on a Thursday in April, National Poetry Month, they each got a special gift—a poem. “We celebrated National Poem in Your Pocket Day in Erie,” said Breanna Mekuly, staff member, and Emmaus was one of the 12 sites that



Breanna Mekuly handing out poems

distributed poems. “A lot of the soup kitchen guests were reading the poems right away—some were even reading them aloud at the table. But others put the poem in their pocket and said they’d read it later,” said Mary Nelson, soup kitchen volunteer. “Some of the poems were confusing to the guests and they weren’t sure what to make of them. So we talked about how sometimes art speaks to you and sometimes you walk away from it just scratching your head. It was neat to see people bond over shared poetry in a place you don’t often expect to see it.” The local effort was sponsored by The Women’s Writing Studio.

In Memory

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

Dorothy E. Straub Detisch Batcho
Albert “Al” Harry Clement
Betty J. Tullio Freeman
Robert J. “Bob” Gutting

Charles E. Horn
Elizabeth “Betty” Murphy
Robert Notley
Jessica Ann Trabert

We also remember Emmaus Volunteers, William R. Dougherty, William “Bill” Francis Liebel Jr., and Philip M. Trejchel

SOUP'S ON: An Emmaus Journal

by staff member Breanna Mekuly. All entries can be found at www.emmauserie.org



This morning I heard on the radio that nearly half the world lives on \$5 or less a day. Five dollars or less. Five dollars buys what in Erie? A burger and fries at McDonalds? Two bus passes—one to work and one back home? Yet this half of the world is still surviving. How they find the ambition to do it, I have no clue.

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Who are the poorest people on earth? Women are. That's why Emmaus Ministries has Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes on staff serving as a full-time women's advocate. "It's a small effort but an important one," said Sister Rosanne. "For instance I was trying to help a woman at the food pantry but she couldn't speak English. I turned to her husband and said, 'Every woman should know how to share where she lives and her phone number.' The husband, who spoke English, told me that his wife didn't learn easily. Then he got a bit angry and asked, 'Why don't you want to talk to me? Do you not like men?'" I looked him straight in the eye and said, "I am an advocate for women and I believe each woman should be able to speak for herself."

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In our world, people who are different are easy targets for abuse and violence. The Emmaus Soup Kitchen is a daily gathering of the "different" who come hoping not only for food, but for safety, acceptance and dignity. Most often they find it. Take our guest who identifies as transgender—who is in the process of transitioning from female to male—and has changed his clothing, hair style and manner. Ann, a weekly volunteer, has helped the guest many times but wasn't sure how to address him. Without any dis-ease or embarrassment on her part, she asked the guest, "Is your name still Jenny?" The guest said no and told Ann his new name. Ann said simply, "Okay," and began to address him according to his gender identity. Not only is this an appropriate and kind way to interact with someone who identifies as transgender, it's also a beautiful testament of how Emmaus volunteers act different from the world's ways and accept guests for who they are.

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For the second semester in a row, Emmaus volunteer Cindy Liotta and I presented students at Mercyhurst University with an opportunity to learn more about Emmaus Ministries. We were guest speakers in two sessions of an "Exploring Catholicism" course. Our presentation entitled "Feeding the Hungry: Graces and Challenges," explores the ins and outs of Emmaus: who we are, what we believe in, who we serve, and why we serve. We then address common myths around the topics of poverty, such as "All poor people are lazy" and "Food stamps are enough."

The students seemed to get a lot out of the discussion about the myths of poverty. One student talked about growing up in a very impoverished area and shared with the class that most of the people in her neighborhood were not lazy but actually working multiple jobs to make ends meet. I think that statement shocked some of her peers.

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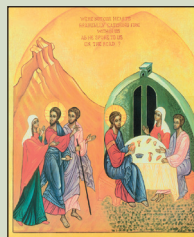


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They came
to know Christ
in the breaking
of the bread.

Luke 24:35



EMMAUS ICON

Emmaus Icon *Road to Emmaus*

Iconographer: Sister Marie-Paul, OSB

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Image provided by The Printery House of Conception Abbey

COVER ART: a replica of the beautiful mosaic found in the Chapel of Magdalene, Duc In Altum, Magdala

ARTIST: María Jesús Fernandez

Magdala is a first century town believed to be the hometown of Mary Magdalene. It is located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and is Israel's newest holy site to be discovered and is currently under development.

www.magdala.org