



The Companion

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www.emmauserie.org



**You must
relieve the lot
of the poor.**

Rule of Benedict Ch. 4

From Sister Mary

Dear Friends of Emmaus,

The cover of this issue of *The Companion* with the image of a Saint Benedict house blessing door hanger protecting the soup kitchen reminds us that we are bearers of a beautiful tradition.

As you know, Emmaus Ministries, though separately incorporated, is an extension of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The Benedictine Sisters is a monastic community that follows the Rule of Saint Benedict, a blueprint for a spiritual way of life that has lasted over 1500 years.

So, it makes you wonder... Would a stranger who visits the soup kitchen, food pantry and Kids Cafe find it any different from the hundreds of soup kitchens that dot the country? Would the visitor sense a Benedictine flavor in the food served and a monastic touch in the relationships forged? In this issue of *The Companion*, we examine those questions by asking others—staff, board members, guests, volunteers—for evidence that Emmaus is true to its monastic tradition.

One thing we know for sure is that feeding the poor and hungry has been a constant concern of Benedictine monasteries throughout the centuries. “You must relieve the lot of the poor,” Saint Benedict instructs in his Rule. And we know that throughout history Benedictine communities taught the neighboring population, especially the peasants, sustainable farming, introduced irrigation systems, and were the first to open soup kitchens.

But what else besides the distribution of food can you find at Emmaus that reflects the richness of monastic spirituality? Can you find hospitality and listening hearts? A seeking after peace and the pursuit of it? Good stewardship as in “treating all goods as vessels of the altar?” A sense of sacred leisure? A respect for difference? An overarching humility that disavows any sense of entitlement between those serving and those being served? An inclusive community? A reverence for dignified and creative work?

After you read through this issue, I hope you can answer, “Yes. Emmaus is a miniature Benedictine community that rings true.” God bless...



Sister Mary



"If there are artisans in the monastery...." Ch. 56



Greg, the poet

Saint Benedict valued artists, devoting an entire chapter in his short rule to those who possessed a creative gift. At Emmaus we are so honored to have artists in our midst such as our regular soup kitchen guest, Greg, who is a poet. One day he recited a poem he wrote for a small group. "Wow," Breanna Mekuly, Emmaus staff member, said, "I didn't know you wrote poetry." He smiled and told her that was one of many, many poems he had written over the years. Breanna suggested if Greg would bring in his favorite ten poems she would type them up. The next week, he brought a grocery bag filled with his poetry, dating back to the 1980s. Here's a stanza from one poem he wrote about the Earth: *The earth goes on,*

though it cries in pain / feeling its resources go down the drain / The earth would do well / to be without men / stealing its resources/ just for money to spend.

"They (prioress and abbot) must point out to the community all that is good and holy more by example than by words...." Ch. 3



Sister Anne Wambach

Sister Anne Wambach, the prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, is in the final year of her ten-year term of office. And every year since she took office, she's been heaping slices of turkey on the plates of guests at the annual Emmaus Thanksgiving meal. That's as it should be since Saint Benedict calls on the leader of the monastery to teach by example. "Thanksgiving memories and rituals have taken on new meaning for me since I began helping at Emmaus's Thanksgiving celebration," Sister Anne explained. "I can think of no better good work for this holiday than being with the gracious guests at the Soup Kitchen."

Emmaus...a miniature Benedictine

"Listen with the ear of your heart...." Prologue

The day after the recent tragic fire at a daycare center in Erie that resulted in the death of five children, a woman walked into the Emmaus Food Panty and asked one of the volunteers to please pray for her family because she was an aunt to four of the children who died. At first there was stunned silence, then long-time volunteer Pam Ekberg stood up, walked around the receptionist table, and put her arms around the woman, who broke down in her arms. "I can't stop crying," she said as Pam held her in a long embrace. Why would a woman so devastated by grief walk to the food panty for a small bag of groceries following such a cataclysmic event? Maybe it's because she knew that at the pantry there are people of great care and concern, people who would not only observe her tears, but listen to them with the ear of their heart.



Pam Ekberg

Your ways must be different than the world's ways...." Ch. 4



TOP PHOTO: A Silent Peace Walk through Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School

The staff and volunteers at Emmaus take seriously Benedict's invitation to choose a prophetic path and stand with those denied a place at the table. Not only do they show up every day to accompany Erie's poor, but they take to the streets to walk with those who suffer because of economic disparity, sexual orientation or gender identity, or are victims of violence.



RIGHT PHOTO: Emmaus staff, Breanna Mekuly and Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes at the Poor People's March in Erie

tine community that rings true

“The young should be treated with kindly consideration....” Ch. 37

In the summer many children get less to eat because they don't get the free breakfasts and lunches that public schools provide from September to June. For that reason, the Kids Cafe partnered with the Neighborhood Art House and provided a hot and healthy lunch for children from both programs during the summer months. Kids Cafe children also were treated to an afternoon at Splash Lagoon, free school shoes, and a trip to the Children's Experience Museum. On a few hot afternoons they cooled off in the fountain on North Park Row, Perry Square in downtown Erie. “They love going to the fountain and want to do it every day,” said Ebony King, a Kids Cafe staff member. “I've never been to the beach,” explained six-year-old Trayvon. “I don't think I'd like it because it's too deep and water would go over my head. But here I can run in the water and not worry about that.”



Children from the Neighborhood Art House eating lunch at the Kids Cafe

“Be the first to show each other respect and consideration.” Ch. 72

The most essential gift that Benedictines give to the world is community. What a miracle that for more than a millennium Benedictines have shown that strangers can live together with a vision of the gospel and in the love of Christ. Oblate and volunteer Barb Roseborough finds a genuine community at the soup kitchen. She writes, “It never ceases to amaze me how pleasantly the guests are welcomed. ‘Hi, how are you?’ ‘How was your day?’ ‘Good to see you!’ Those phrases, and others like them, echo along the serving line. And wonderfully, the vast majority of guests respond in kind, often with a beautiful smile and words of blessing. That phrase from the hymn of St. Francis, ‘it is in giving that we receive,’ comes to life at Emmaus.” And Emmaus board member Sister Linda Romey finds community extended beyond the kitchen and pantry doors. She writes, “On occasion when I have been in downtown Erie in the company of an Emmaus staff person, we have run into soup kitchen guests. Recognition lights up the faces of both the guest and the staff person and they greet each other like old friends. And I know I am seeing true community.”



“Seek peace and pursue it.” Prologue

What happens when there's a disagreement on the food line at Emmaus Soup Kitchen? When one of the guests erupts in anger? When fists start flying? The Blue Coats are the first thing that happens. Trained in non-violence techniques and conflict resolution strategies, the Blue Coats, a volunteer organization committed to bringing peace to inner-city neighborhoods, has a presence at Emmaus. “Blue Coats” Ray Humphries and Bruce Wayne (aka “Batman”) are on site daily to help diffuse any conflict eruption. “As Blue Coats, the work we do is not of us but of God—it's a ministry,” explained Bruce.



Bruce Wayne (“Batman”) and Ray Humphries, the two Blue Coats who serve at Emmaus

“We believe that a half a bottle of wine a day is sufficient for each.” Ch. 40

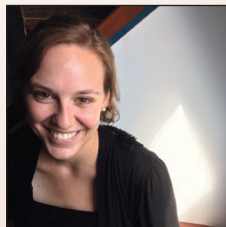


A Benedictine Rule that goes to great lengths to make sure monks get enough wine each day knows something about feasting. So, what makes the Emmaus Grove different from the many beautiful neighborhood gardens sprouting up all over the city? The annual Harvest Fest of course. How does Emmaus celebrate the tons of food harvested and then given to food pantry and soup kitchen guests? It invites the city to an outdoor picnic with music by Tennessee Back Porch, dancing, abundant food, contests, prizes, and tours of the garden. Now that's a Benedictine party.

“In Benedictine spirituality feasting is a divine imperative. It says, ‘Thou shalt not ignore the joys of life,’” writes Sister Joan Chittister, Emmaus board member.

SOUP'S ON: An Emmaus Journal

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



"I'm exhausted," said the young mother who brought her three little kids in to eat right before the soup kitchen was scheduled to close. "I just worked a 10-hour shift, picked the kids up from daycare, and I'm hoping they'll go to bed well tonight." She was on her own with the children because her husband was working his job. "What kind of work are you doing?" I asked. "Landscaping," she replied. "It's a great job but it's hard work." The oldest child, a six-year-old girl full of bouncy energy, added: "Mommy makes a lot of money! Her boss pays her every week!" Her mom laughed. "Well, I'm not paid every week, nor do I make 'a lot' of money—but enough to pay some of the bills for now."

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"I just moved and everything in my house is all disorganized and I don't have any food and can't remember the last time I ate..." she said in all one breath when she came to the door of the soup kitchen. "I'm starving."

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"I make \$8 an hour," a woman waiting to meet with Sister Rosanne—the woman's advocate—told me. "That's not enough to get by. Even working two jobs I can't make enough in a day to pay for my rent and all my other bills. I'm planning to go to the Tech and get a degree in Management so I can at least make \$10 an hour or more." I'm glad to hear she is thinking ahead and being proactive about trying to support herself but at the same time, I wonder if the \$10 an hour she'll make after her degree will pay for her current bills and cover her newly acquired student loans.

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A woman was being asked questions about who her support system is—family, friends, other people she calls when in need. "I have seven siblings but they aren't my support system," she said. "When I need someone, I go to Emmaus and talk to Colleen (one of our regular volunteers) and the other Emmaus staff. They help me."

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Jess was acting up at the soup kitchen, swearing and trying to get in fights with her husband in front of everyone in the dining room. Sister Rosanne tried to calm her down but it didn't work. So finally she said, "Jess, listen, you can't act like this here. Your behavior is unacceptable so you have to leave today. You can come back tomorrow but today you're out." Then Sister Rosanne shared some Benedictine wisdom with Jess: "Whatever happened today is over and done with. The Rule of Benedict says 'always begin again.' Each day is a new day, a fresh start. Tomorrow you can start again."

For the Record . . . We Give Thanks

ERIE GIVES . . . AND GIVES . . . AND . . . "I'm always grateful for the amount of money donated to Emmaus during the annual Erie Gives fundraising day," said Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus, "but I'm more pleased by the number of donors who contribute because it shows that the Erie community cares for the poor and hungry." Held in mid-August, the 12-hour online and check fundraiser hosted by the Erie Community Foundation included 391 nonprofits, and raised a record total of over \$5,500,000. Emmaus ranked in the top ten of total number of donors and in the top 20 of total amount given. In addition to receiving over \$65,000 in donations, Emmaus, and all the other participating non-profits, will receive a pro-rated share of matching funds from the Erie Community Foundation.



FOOD FUND When the Northwestern Pennsylvania Food Council recently dissolved, it shared its half-a-million-dollar savings fund with a number of non-profits, including a gift of \$30,000 to Emmaus Ministries. "Because this gift came from an organization of family-owned grocery stores and wholesale food suppliers, we immediately designated the entire amount to the purchase of food for the soup kitchen," explained Margaret Kloecker, Emmaus associate director. The organization gave its Fund to the Erie Community Foundation to distribute to eleven non-profits and to set up scholarship assistance for students pursuing a career in the food or grocery industry.



Non-profit Food Fund recipients gathered with the Erie Community Foundation

BREAK THE STIGMA To raise awareness about alcoholism and drug abuse, Bret Imboden, a Certified Intervention Specialist in Erie, organized a "Break the Stigma" 2K walk and run fundraiser at Presque Isle in early June, naming Emmaus Ministries and Erie City Mission as recipients of the monies raised. Jean Kloecker, a long-time soup kitchen volunteer, said that the owner of the company where she worked urged participation and when the employees began talking about the event, "we realized that almost all of us had a family member or friend suffering from substance abuse but we never talked about it because of the stigma. And that's why we walked—to break the stigma."



Sister Mary Miller and volunteer Jean Kloecker at the "Break the Stigma" 2K Walk

Practicing the Gospel



The 40 children attending the Vacation Bible School at Wayside Presbyterian Church did more than listen to and learn some Bible stories...they put the scripture they studied into practice. Accompanied by 20 teenagers, parents, and Pastor Keith Sundberg, the children—ranging in age from three-years-old to elementary school age—visited the Emmaus Soup Kitchen to learn about the poor in Erie and see where they eat. Staff member Breanna Mekuly greeted the children, told them about Emmaus, and accepted the cookies they had frosted for the soup kitchen guests, as well as the placemats they colored and tissue flowers they made for each of the tables in the kitchen.

2019 Helping Hands Award

Mike Bailey, co-coordinator of Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School, received the 2019 Helping Hands Award from Erie Catholic Charities at its annual fundraiser, Club CC Night, held at the Bayfront Convention Center in the spring. The award, given each year to someone in the Erie diocese for outstanding service to the church and to the community, noted Mike's five years as master gardener of Emmaus Grove



Mike Bailey

at St. Luke's and Pfeiffer-Burleigh and coordinating service hours for students in the diocese's confirmation program.

and his efforts to harvest tons of produce for soup kitchen and pantry guests. Mike was also cited for his volunteer work with other nonprofits, including overseeing the school gardens

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In Memory

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

Lawrence Richard "Larry" Baumann
LaVerne Carver
Millicent Cook Krzewinski
Fedorchak
Richard L. Hofmann
John C. Koehler

Mildred "Millie" Kuntz
Ethel Marguerite MacKrell
Van Volkenburg
Elaine Marie Schwab
Harold L. (Ike) Stein
Carney E. Vensel

We also remember Emmaus Volunteers,

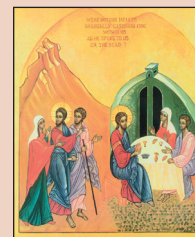
Elaine J. Boetger, Alfonse A. "Al" Bucheral and John "Jack" A. Green

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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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Benedictine House Blessing Door Hanger
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