



The Companion

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*You bless the year with your bounty;
your path overflows with a fruitful harvest.*

Psalm 65



Emmaus Grove Celebrates 10 Years

From Sister Val . . .

Dear Friends,

Some of my favorite memories from childhood are playing in the backyard while my mom watered our garden on summer nights. My sister and I would run around the shed next to the garden, trying to hide from Mom. When we would come around the



Sister Valerie Luckey, Director of Emmaus

corner, she would douse us with the hose while we laughed and continued running in circles, waiting for the next spray of cool water.

When I was in kindergarten, Mom started working at the local garden center. I spent many evenings there while she worked, skipping across paths learning which plants were annuals and which were perennials, which flowers had the nicest smells, and which herbs were the tastiest. It felt magical, walking through rows of bright colors, wonderful scents, and the beauty of nature.

Sister Mary, too, loved the garden. Just before she died, she came into the office with a daffodil that had fallen



off its stem. She found a small glass, added water, and revived the yellow bloom. Sister Mary delighted in it each morning for the next few days, grateful for its beauty.

Our intuition tells us, and now research does, too, that nature has healing power. There is forest bathing where we allow time with trees to calm our anxiety and plant-based diets that lower our blood pressure. Today our connection to nature is jeopardized, as forest fires spread and the climate crisis threatens our future.

All this makes me even more grateful that Emmaus Grove is part of Emmaus Ministries. Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, the Emmaus Grove garden volunteers—some who have been involved since its first days—have harvested more than 20,000 pounds of fresh produce to share with our guests over the past decade. I can still picture Jim, a frequent guest who has since died, biting into a whole, fresh cucumber at our soup kitchen last summer.

How wonderful the gift of nature we offer through the bounty of Emmaus Grove. In this issue of *The Companion* we look back on the history of the garden, the commitment of its founders and volunteers, and the joy of ripe fruit and soil-stained hands.

We pray during the Eucharistic liturgy, “Blessed are you, God of all Creation, through your goodness. . . we offer you: Fruit of the vine, work of human hands,” and so let us praise God for the wonder and goodness of creation, and come to love it more deeply. May we, like Sister Mary, be recklessly devoted to every single blossom.

In peace,

Sister Val

The Seeds of Emmaus Grove

by Liz Allen, Emmaus Staff Writer

As Emmaus Grove celebrates its 10th anniversary some would measure its success by the numbers: harvesting 2,000 to 2,500 pounds of produce each year—and also by the garden’s growth: increasing from 40 to 60 beds. But there’s no way to quantify all the love and life and generosity sowed into it during the last decade.

The first seeds of what would become Emmaus Grove were planted in 2001, by children who attended the Kids Cafe and volunteer Cindy Soltys, who worked with them in a small space next to the East 10th Street Kids Cafe and later behind the Neighborhood Art House at 10th and Holland. A Master Gardener, she guided them in everything from compost usage to weeding and watering for nine years. In January 2013, Cindy died of cancer. But her beloved garden kept on growing.

Rosemary Gantz, who taught refugees at Saint Benedict Education Center, wondered if her students—many of whom were farmers by training—would learn English more easily in a garden, tending to plants and talking about food.

Sister Mary Miller, then the Director of Emmaus, “loved the idea,” Rosemary recalled. So did Ellen DiPlacido, Rosemary’s coworker. With ground already cultivated by Cindy, Rosemary and Ellen enrolled in Penn State Extension’s Master Gardener program to learn more.

Their first hurdle came when they began planning to expand. The land beyond Cindy’s original garden beds belonged to Solomon’s Porch Apostolic Ministries, not to Emmaus. But Solomon’s Porch’s Elder Rick Sprague agreed to let them borrow the land, as long as the produce was tithed back to the community. “On a handshake, he gave us the land,” Rosemary said. “I went home, designed the landscape, and showed it to Sister Mary.”

The next obstacle was financial: their preliminary budget estimated that costs for the first year would be \$10,000. Rosemary prayed and heard a voice say, “You cannot NOT do this.” Once again, the generosity of others made the dream possible. Organizations like Stan’s Garden Center, Johnston’s Evergreen Nursery and Garden Center, Home Depot, schools, and churches donated soil, plants, seeds, tools, and other necessities.

Volunteers showed up, moved all the soil, and tilled every box. Even the ceramic markers, still used in the beds, were a donation from Neighborhood Art House kids.

The garden’s longevity is “a credit to the people of Erie and to the longstanding good works of the Benedictines,” Rosemary said. “The original donors weren’t saying ‘yes’ to me. They were saying ‘yes’ to the community.”



Top: Cindy Soltys with a child from the Kids Cafe
Bottom: Rosemary Gantz (left) with Ellen DiPlacido

A HARVEST OF LOVE

On Monday and Tuesday mornings volunteers harvest produce from Emmaus Grove before the Emmaus Food Pantry opens to its guests. But it’s not simply that guests receive this homegrown food; it’s about the spirit with which it is shared that makes a difference. Emmaus Staff Writer Liz Allen shares stories of the bounty at the food pantry.

This time of year, the Emmaus Food Pantry is an especially exciting, colorful place to be.

All year round, guests begin to line up early outside the pantry every Monday and Tuesday morning, as a team of volunteers works hard inside. The volunteers get paperwork in order to register newcomers, sort through the weekly order from Second Harvest Food Bank, and then arrange it all so that guests can easily select whatever they and their families will choose to take home.

The long tables inside the pantry are lined with a plentiful assortment of bread, milk, eggs, cereal, packaged or canned fruits and vegetables, soup, peanut butter and jelly, and a variety of meat or fish. And in late summer and early autumn, something even more exciting is available: pounds and pounds



of fresh produce that grew right behind them, at Emmaus Grove. Harvested and bagged by other volunteers, these tomatoes, greens, apples, herbs, squash, and other fruits and vegetables are more than just nutritious: they are a real source of joy for the guests, who can rarely find or afford these delicacies in stores.

George, who comes to the pantry for food every other week, jokes that his grandchildren’s eyes usually well up with tears when he cooks vegetables for them. But when his 12 grandkids taste what George prepares from the fresh produce at Emmaus Food Pantry, those tears turn into smiles, he says.

“I watch a lot of cooking shows,” George shared. He may cut up cabbage, throw in some collard greens and add some turkey. Or he might sauté the just-picked eggplant he selected at the pantry with some squash, mushrooms and a little butter.

As George and other guests move through the line, they and the volunteers exchange ideas about how to cook some of the more unusual vegetables. It’s just one small part of the way they come to know each other.

A HARVEST OF LOVE



Pam Eckberg, who has been volunteering at Emmaus since 2008, keeps a spreadsheet with data about the food pantry's customers. But her job requires much more than office skills. "You remember whose mother is sick and whose son is in trouble. You have to be a people person. You keep track if there is something special they need—diapers, shoes," she said.

When money is tight, it's hard to justify spending on produce. Linda, a grandparent and pantry guest, explained that her SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits of about \$100 a month don't stretch far at the grocery store, where fresh produce often starts at \$2.99 per pound and goes up from there. But the risks of going without the nutrients found in fruits and vegetables are not to be taken lightly, and after dealing with some major health challenges, she's committed to eating nutritiously.

"We have seen the number of people coming through our pantry line rise since the extra allotment of SNAP benefits from the pandemic ended in March," said Catherine Simon, the soup kitchen and food pantry coordinator, "so having extra produce during the summer months helps us out." And at Emmaus Grove and Food Pantry, there's more than enough to go around. Divante Jones, who says he's been "living in a tent somewhere," didn't know about the food pantry until he happened to walk by. He was so hungry that he immediately opened a box of cereal outside and washed it down with the half-gallon of milk he had received.

Spotting Linda, he offered her the eggs he had been given, because he had nowhere to cook them.

Then he shared a bag of cherries with everyone on the block.

Left Page Top: Volunteer Annette Arenas harvests beans from the arbor; Bottom: Guest George shows his food from the pantry.

Right Page Top: Pam Eckberg (left) greets a guest coming to the pantry; Bottom: Master Gardener and volunteer Deb Totzke brings in produce from the Grove to give away.



An Emmaus Grove Almanac

by Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB; Emmaus Staff Writer

Almanacs are annual guides that help orient us to what is important in our daily lives. The Emmaus Grove Almanac gives short glimpses into the history and inspiration behind this decade-long ministry.



The origins of Emmaus Grove—students learning how to garden.

English vocabulary for the farming work they already knew well. Suleyman told *The Companion* that his father had a big farm in his home country, and explained that working in the gardens "makes me feel happy. I like the work. We get to take some food home to eat."

July 9, 2013: *Emmaus Grove: The Erie Urban Farm School* officially opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The first annual Harvest Fest was held later the same year.

February 26, 2014: Mike Bailey, Master Gardener, joined the Emmaus Grove volunteer team and became co-coordinator. "You know, it's just been a wonderful experience," Mike said of his time at Emmaus. "You meet wonderful people. You work with wonderful people. And I think all the volunteers feel the same way; this garden is our 'Happy Place.'" Mike and Ellen DiPlacido remain co-coordinators of the Grove.

July 29, 1970: The Delano grape strike, led by American labor leaders and justice advocates Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, ended. A victory for all workers, this strike raised awareness of the exploitation of migrant farm workers and awakened the nation to the need to uphold their dignity.

August 3, 2010: Suleyman Abdulaziz, a Sudanese man who had lived in Erie for six months, is interviewed for *The Companion*. Refugees, like Suleyman, who attended programs at Saint Benedict Education Center, had begun tending to raised beds behind the soup kitchen, and learned



Emmaus Grove co-coordinator Mike Bailey ready to share a harvest of carrots.

September 29: In many Christian churches, today is the feast of the Archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. Traditionally known as Michaelmas, it marked the end of the harvest season and, in the Middle Ages, it was celebrated by giving a goose or a sheep to the poor. Special bread was also baked in memory of the dead.

For the Record

Summer Fun at the Kids Cafe



Ice-cold lemonade, afternoons at Presque Isle, and outdoor festivals are some things that make Erie summers special for kids. This summer Kids Cafe children hosted two successful lemonade stands, received a fishing lesson from the SONS of Lake Erie, and enjoyed Chalk Art created by Kids Cafe coordinator Jane Wagner during Celebrate Erie days.



SEPTEMBER 24

Join the Emmaus Walking Team at Presque Isle as part of the annual CROP Walk. CROP Walk is a national movement to end hunger by supporting organizations directly helping the poor. To learn more, visit: <https://events.crophungerwalk.org/2023/event/eriepa>

OCTOBER 1

Emmaus will host its annual Harvest Fest to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Emmaus Grove. Join us at 218 East 11th Street from 1-4 p.m. for live music, food, raffles, and garden tours.



We Give Thanks

Emmaus Ministries offers its gratitude to the **Knights of Saint George** for sponsoring summer trips for Kids Cafe children...**AmeriHealth Caritas** for a \$500 grant for Emmaus Grove...**TOPS Friendly Markets** for \$1,000 worth of gift cards for guests...**American Tinning and Galvanizing** for donations of bottled water, especially for the Soup Kitchen cookout in honor of Sister Mary...**Melanie Shufuran and Ralph Edes** for regular food and supply donations...**Barb Ehrensberger** for regular diaper donations...**Emma Kill and her classmates at Cathedral Prep**



Summer campers from Temple Anshe Heshed pack food to donate.

who make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches each week...**First Presbyterian Church of Girard** for its donation toward our work...**the Campers at Temple Anshe Heshed** for making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, muffins, and bags of food items for the soup kitchen and food pantry...**Debbie and Mark Woods** for their donations of toys and other items for the Kids Cafe...**all the local gardeners** who donate fresh produce from their homes...**the team of volunteers from Erie Insurance** who painted the Kids Cafe...**Ed Torres and the EMTA** for free rides for Kids Cafe field trips...**Mercyhurst Beyond the Gates** for its donation of clothing for the Kids Cafe...**Connecting Hands** for its donation of shelves to the Kids Cafe...**Robert Herman** for his donation of bikes...and **everyone who contributes** to the work of feeding the hungry at Emmaus each day... We are grateful!



"I learned quickly that Erie is generous, but I am also learning that the community seems to outdo itself each year on Erie Gives Day," said Sister Valerie Luckey, Emmaus Director. "We are grateful yet again to receive so much support from so many good people. Your gift to us makes each meal, each food bag, each seed planted possible."

Emmaus Ministries received over \$113,000 on Erie Gives Day 2023, representing more than 450 donors.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

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:

Leo Jefferson Miller
Thomas L. "Tom" Thompson
Stephen Totleben

Cooking Out for Sister Mary

What better describes summer than friends gathered together outdoors surrounded by the smell of charcoal on a hot grill? On a warm Tuesday in late June, over 300 guests enjoyed a special cookout at the soup kitchen in memory and celebration of Sister Mary Miller, longtime and much-loved Emmaus Director who died on May 14. Volunteers, staff, board members, and Benedictine sisters helped to serve hot dogs, baked beans, and a special ice cream sundae bar while sharing stories of Sister Mary. “How wonderful it was to see so many people who make Emmaus the beautiful place it is come together to celebrate a beautiful person. I miss her dearly, but being together keeps Sister Mary’s spirit alive,” shared Sister Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, Emmaus Women’s Advocate.



Top to bottom: Volunteer Dick Ruedy and Emmaus Administrative Assistant Margaret Kloecker enjoy time at the grill; Guest Greg and Emmaus Social Worker Rita Scrimenti at the sundae bar; Emmaus Staff Writer Liz Allen talks to a guest about the impact of Sister Mary; Retired Emmaus Staff Sister Lucia Surmik greets longtime guest, Jim; Blue Coats Leader Daryl Craig (left) and Soup Kitchen Blue Coat Bruce Wayne bring a good message.

STAFF: Valerie Luckey, OSB; Margaret Kloecker; Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB; Rita Scrimenti; Catherine Simon; Jane Wagner; Susan Doubet, OSB; Liz Allen
Companion Staff: Valerie Luckey, OSB; Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB; Liz Allen



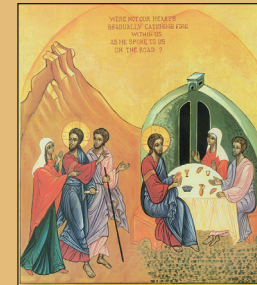
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They came
to know Christ
in the breaking
of the bread.

Luke 24:35