



September 2025
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The Companion

www.emmauserie.org



From Sister Val ...

Dear Friends,

As far as I know, the Buddhist monk and peacemaker Thich Nhat Hanh never spent much time in a soup kitchen. But his teachings are important, encouraging, and challenging, especially for those of us who care about the vulnerable people who come to Emmaus Ministries, and other similar places across the country. Take his poem, "The Good News," for example, printed as *Food for the Soul* in this issue.

At Emmaus Ministries, we know all about the bad news: the funding cuts to SNAP and Medicaid that leave our guests hungry and sick, the executive orders that send to jail and institutionalize those experiencing homelessness, the slashing of rental aid programs, the increasing extreme weather that makes life on the street even more dangerous. We read the headlines and we see the toll that they take on the people who come to us each evening.

Still, we know the good news of possibility and endurance and compassion. We know the good news of the Gospel. Much as Jesus' companions on the road to Emmaus, shown on the cover of this issue, were stunned and pained by the brutality of his crucifixion, they also had "the good news" very close at hand, and were about to become a part of spreading it to the world. The flowers by the side of the road smile and sing, as if they know the reality of Resurrection.

This issue of *The Companion* is a testament to the good news that abounds alongside the ever-visible bad news. You'll read about some of our staff, volunteers, and friends who are "standing firm" and "offering the things that are not wrong." You're holding the good news in your hands. Thank you for listening to it.



Sister Valerie Luckey, Director of Emmaus,
at Emmaus Grove

In peace,

Sister Val

Food for the Soul

The Good News

The good news
they do not print.
The good news
we do print.

We have a special edition every moment
that we need you to read.

The good news is that you are alive
and the linden tree is still there
standing firm in the harsh winter.

The good news is that you have wonderful eyes
to touch the blue sky.

The good news is that
your child is there before you,
and your arms are available.

Hugging is possible.

They print only what is wrong.

Look at each of our special editions.

We always offer the things that are not wrong.

We want you to benefit from them
and help protect them.

The dandelion is there by the sidewalk,
smiling its wondrous smile,
singing the song of eternity.

Lo! You have ears capable of hearing it.
Bow your head.

Listen to her.

Leave behind your world of sorrow
and preoccupation
and get free.

The latest good news
is that you can do it.

Thich Nhat Hanh

The Good News

LOCAL FOOD SOLUTIONS SPROUT UP TO ADDRESS GROWING HUNGER CRISIS

by Liz Allen

"No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it," wrote Halford Luccock. The enormous task of feeding and caring for Erie's hungry is like that: we at Emmaus play our daily part, and the collaborative efforts of our friends and partners in other organizations enrich, support, and broaden the mission.

At Emmaus Food Pantry, for example, volunteers and guests know that the kinds of groceries that are available vary not just season to season, but week to week. It's exciting for everyone when special food items are donated by a local business, like when Country Fair contributes frozen meats. And in recent years, new organizations and initiatives have helped to ensure that guests have access to fresh, seasonal produce, even when there is more demand than Emmaus Grove can supply.



(L-R) Melissa Pfeifer, Benedictine Peacemaker; Sister Valerie Luckey, Director of Emmaus; Deb Totzke, Emmaus Grove Coordinator; Margaret Kloecker, Emmaus Administrative Assistant; Jaime Maguire, AmeriHealth Caritas Senior Community Health Educator; Ellen DiPlacido, Emmaus Grove Coordinator; and Mike Bailey, Emmaus Grove Coordinator gather to receive a grant from AmeriHealth Caritas, an insurance company for low-income and chronically ill people, in support of Emmaus Grove.

programming for urban agriculture and community resilience. Already this season, young people working for Groundwork Erie harvested about 1,000 pounds of food a week, according to Erin Carey, director. Some of that produce came to Emmaus, while most was offered to neighbors and other city residents, who can come to the farm far more easily and more affordably than the grocery store.

"Like what Emmaus Grove offers to food pantry guests, folks who come to the Pay-What-You-Can stands come to us and walk away with fresh zucchini and kale. It makes an impact on people and their health," Erin said.

Stephanie Ciner, owner of Wild Field Urban Farm, and Stephanie Thauer, owner of Raintree Farms, started a single Pay-What-You-Can farm stand five years ago, where anyone can come to pick up locally-grown fruits and vegetables at whatever price they can afford. Now there are seven such stands throughout Erie County, including one the two women operate at East 15th and Parade Streets Tuesday afternoons from July through October.

The new Fourth Street Farm also has a Pay-What-You-Can stand in the 300 block of East Fourth Street. The stand is operated by Groundwork Erie, an organization that develops

The Good News

The Pay-What-You-Can economy is small, circular and based on reciprocity. “What keeps me doing this as a volunteer is that we’re building relationships and connections within our community,” said Stephanie Ciner.

These relationships and connections are especially important now, with the slashing of budgets for government programs designed to keep Americans healthy. Catherine Simon, Food Pantry Coordinator, says a young woman recently came to the pantry in tears because her Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits had been cut and her monthly allotment was depleted. Over 350 households come to the pantry each week to receive supplemental food, which Emmaus purchases through Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania. “The number of people utilizing the food pantry and eating at the soup kitchen is growing,” Catherine added.

Gregory Hall, executive director of Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, has a similar story to share—and that’s before the coming federal budget cuts kick in. “We see our neighbors in need every day. Fifteen percent of people in northwest Pennsylvania don’t always know where their next meal is coming from. There are more than 100,000 children, families, single parents, grandparents, veterans, who are already on the edge—and now that edge is crumbling,” he said.

Second Harvest is working “to build stronger and more collaborative partnerships within our charitable food network with faith- and community-based pantries, soup kitchens and emergency food programs,” said Hall.

That collaborative spirit is alive and well at Emmaus, from the staff to the guests. On any given Monday or Tuesday morning, you can find a long line of people waiting outside the food pantry. Someone saves a spot for the woman who sits down to ease her knee pain. They smile at the mom with four youngsters chattering in Ukrainian. They welcome a young newcomer. There is going to be enough for all of them.

NURSE SARAH PRYLINSKI AND SOUP KITCHEN GUESTS BUILD RAPPORT

by Liz Allen

Every Monday at 4 p.m., Sarah Prylinski, BSN, visits Emmaus Soup Kitchen, where she calmly multitasks. Sarah is a nurse by profession and a listener by nature.

Both her job skills and her manner serve her well in her work as clinical program manager for the Hamot Health Foundation’s BUILD Community Development Corp. BUILD focuses on “health, homes and hope” to reduce disparities in health outcomes across Erie.



Stephanie Ciner (left) and Stephanie Thauer, at the Pay-What-You-Can stand on 15th and Parade, started the first stand in Erie five years ago.

The Good News

As a member of BUILD’s “street outreach team,” Sarah concentrates on one of BUILD’s four goals: providing trusted access to health care. (BUILD’s other goals include working on safe and affordable housing; offering career and workforce development; and supporting thriving neighborhoods.)

She helps Emmaus guests navigate the bureaucracy of the health insurance system. She facilitates medical appointments. She makes referrals to Erie County Care Management for housing issues. She provides “harm reduction” products, including test strips for the addictive drugs Xylazine and Fentanyl.

Often, she is simply a trusted friend for people facing multiple challenges—arthritic joints, ruptured family ties, mental health worries and, sometimes, looming court proceedings. “Trusted access to health care is our number one thing to do,” she said. “How better to do that than to be the liaison to people? To help people find what they need?”

Sarah is easy to approach. “People ask me anything. There is no topic they can’t ask,” she said.

For those who are homeless, as many Emmaus guests are, “We already know they aren’t going to be as healthy as those who are housed.” In fact, Hamot Health Foundation research uncovered a 24-year gap in health outcomes between those who live in Erie’s poorest ZIP Code, 16503, and those from the most affluent neighborhood, 16505. In other words, Erie’s poorest people are likely to die 24 years earlier than those who are well off. “It’s not a fair gap. We need to work to close it,” said Sarah.



In a different setting, communication might be an extra challenge. But consider how Sarah relates to Brandon, 39. Deaf since birth and kicked out of shelters, he now lives in a tent. He takes five prescription pills a day; tracking his meds is hard. “I am afraid if I skip one,” Brandon explained in writing.

Sitting across from Sarah at the soup kitchen, Brandon texted that he had forgotten to pick up his pills from the Mental Health Association of Northwestern Pennsylvania, where they were safely stored. (Diabetics can also keep insulin refrigerated there.)

She assured him that she would retrieve his prescription drugs while he ate. He read her lips. She read his heart.

Sarah Prylinski shares her joy and her gifts with guests at Emmaus.

For the Record

Neighborhood Art House Holds Cooking Class at Soup Kitchen

Every great chef starts as a beginner. The Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, a ministry of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie that offers free art classes to children, held a weeklong cooking class at the soup kitchen during its summer session in July. Tess Frawley, the teacher, worked with a group of students cooking up pizzas, blueberry cobblers, ramen, and burgers with fries using fresh ingredients.

"Cooking can be so meaningful for kids," shared Carly DiFuccia, soup kitchen cook. "Besides learning how to prepare food for oneself, cooking as a group offers opportunities to practice sharing space, to consider the needs of others, and to gather together around a table. I am grateful we could offer our kitchen to provide that experience."

Neighborhood Art House students show off their personal pizzas before putting them in the oven.



Emmaus Participates in Juneteenth Community Celebration

Community is a beautiful thing, no matter the season or weather. When rainstorms forced a move from downtown Erie's Perry Square, the adjacent Flagship City Food Hall became the host venue for a Juneteenth community dinner hosted by the Erie Food Policy Advisory Council and the Erie Downtown Partnership.

Emmaus collaborated with several other local food organizations and black-owned businesses to create a feast for all. Carly DiFuccia, soup kitchen cook, prepared vegan cornbread. Jane Wagner, Emmaus staff, and Sister Linda Romey, Emmaus board member, handed out informational ministry materials. Carly and Sister Linda also participate as members of the Food Policy Advisory Council.

Jane Wagner, Emmaus Staff, hands out information about ministry services at Juneteenth gathering.



For the Record

Emmaus Receives Record Amount During Erie Gives



"Every year I never think it's possible, and yet the above and beyond generosity continues to exceed itself year after year. Thank you to all who made for a record-breaking Erie Gives day!" said Sister Valerie Luckey, director of Emmaus.

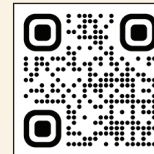
During the annual giving day sponsored by the Erie Community Foundation, Emmaus Ministries received \$148,409, its largest total ever. This ranks in the top 20 of donations received by nonprofits and in the top 10 in number of donations, with 513 unique gifts.

Save the Dates!

CROP HUNGER WALK
ENDING HUNGER ONE STEP AT A TIME

Join for the 50th anniversary walk!
Sunday, September 28th
Presque Isle State Park
Beach One

1 p.m. Registration
2 p.m. Walk



HARVEST FEST
at
Emmaus Grove

Celebrate our gardeners and the harvest!
Sunday, October 5th
Emmaus Grove
218 East 11th Street
1-4 p.m.

Concert by Tennessee Back Porch
Garden Tours
Raffles and Prizes

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:

Richard Foessett, Jr.
Jerome (Jerry) Kruszewski
Gerald P. Parshall
Marylou Finley Clark Partington
Dean (Dino) Pinciotti
Karen Shrum
William Stephany
Terese M. (Mehler) Kontis Wieszczyk

For the Record

Emmaus Ministries Welcomes Benedictine Peacemaker

Melissa Pfeifer joined the Emmaus staff as part of the Benedictine Peacemakers program in June. Started by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Benedictine Peacemakers offers a year-long immersive monastic experience to women between 22-30 years old. Spending two days a week in ministry with Emmaus, Melissa serves dinner in the family room at the soup kitchen on Thursday afternoons. She offers reflections on her first weeks.



Melissa Pfeifer serves apple juice to a child dining in the family room.

I've been serving in the family room on Thursdays since beginning the Benedictine Peacemakers program in mid-June.

I've served in restaurants before. The work is comparable. People come in and take their seats. I ask what they want to drink. Everyone gets the same meal instead of ordering. That's economical but also magnanimous. Family-style dining offers more freedom than a five-page menu. Mirroring the restaurant experience, some tables make additional requests and some don't. Some interact loudly and some don't. Some tidy up before leaving and some don't. Unlike my waitressing days, I don't put a book down with the bill. I don't appraise my

performance by the tip's proximity to our nonsensical 20% norm. I don't question if I was attentive to the needs of the people because it was in my best interest or because I actually cared. Those motivations aren't mutually exclusive, but I sure am inspired by clearcut virtue. Every dinner at Emmaus is a large-scale pay-it-forward demonstration.

Over \$148,000 donated on Erie Gives astounded me. I did some math to give it meaning. Five meals per week, \$4 per meal. If the trend of 200 guests per meal continues, \$148,000 doesn't even cover the cost of food for a year. And this place has been open for 50 years. So I just want to say thank you. Thank you for every generosity. By the grace of God, we'll always have enough.



To learn more about the Benedictine Peacemakers program, visit the QR code.

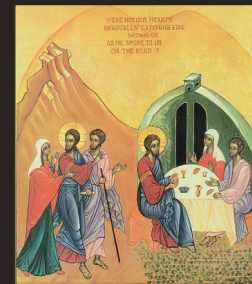
STAFF: Valerie Luckey, OSB; Margaret Kloecker, Rosanne Lindal-Hynes, OSB; Catherine Simon; Jane Wagner, Susan Doubet, OSB; Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB; Liz Allen; Carly DiFuccia; Tom Hoffman
COMPANION STAFF: Valerie Luckey, OSB; Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB; Liz Allen



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Icon *Road to Emmaus*
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They came
to know Christ
in the breaking
of the bread.

Luke 24:35

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