



# **Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership**

2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

**Week 4**  
(March 4 – 8)



**Monday, March 4**  
**ALL PEOPLES GATHERING CHURCH, MILWAUKEE**  
**FOOD PANTRY PARTNERSHIPS**

**Brian Bolling:** Hello! My name is Brian Bolling. I am the Food Dude at All Peoples Gathering Lutheran Church on 2nd and Clark in Milwaukee. And I run the food pantry here.

During the summer, we are serving approximately 2500 people per week from this location. And we could not do this - none of us could do what we do without partners and support from all the generous partners that we have.

For example, we have a partner that weekly comes down and brings food, not only from their church, whatever has been donated that week... But I give them an actual shopping list of two items per week. And they bring between 60 and 75 cans of food every week. And that's when we're serving 90 people or families, almost, on average, in our little pantry here. That's an amazing partnership that you can't put into words hardly.

This ministry does fulfill the hope for many, many families during the year. We all hear about Thanksgiving and Christmas. And we see all these big celebrities getting on their soapbox and standing in a pantry. But you know, people do need to eat more than twice a year, Thanksgiving and Christmas. So, it's just very, very instrumental to have partners as generous as what we do have, to be able to feed and do what we do here.

The donors that donate to Outreach for Hope - whoever they are, wherever they come from, whatever walk of life they're from - is an amazing central island that then spreads out to many different... I think there's 20-some organizations, that they then grant to all of us - to help keep us clothing, feeding, you know, taking care of people that are in the biggest need. And we thank you! I thank you for all of the light that you have shone on us. And the hope that you give to the people that we serve, the guests that we serve. It is so important! Thank you so much. Blessings to you!

**PRAYER:** Generous God: Thank you for all that you have provided. Thank you for relationships through which we have the opportunity to give generously and receive abundantly. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

***Using the daily devotional practice of St Ignatius in his Examen, take a moment to reflect on today's devotion...***

1. *What thoughts, questions, and feelings come up for you?*
2. *Invite God's Spirit to speak to you about your reflections and also what is happening in your life today.*
3. *Notice any feelings of thankfulness, retrospect, repentance, and renewal.*
4. *What is God encouraging you to do with these thoughts and feelings?*
5. *Ask God to lead you today and into tomorrow - guiding you towards something particularly important.*

**Tuesday, March 5**  
**FAITH/SANTA FE LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE**  
**FOOD PANTRY**

**Jazmin Artigas:** I have met a lot of people with the food pantry. There's a lot of needs, that has come here at the church. And I'm always open to helping many families. I got a great connection with [Just One More Meal] ministry. And I had a great experience with them.

The connection with the people has been pretty good. I have received a lot of invitations, and other food pantries, but right now I'm starting little by little. And I hope I can continue a little bit more...

Yes, we do get a lot of people who come back in. We serve at least 15 families. And every Saturday they're here for their food pantry. And they're really thankful for them.

I have received a person from Venezuela. They came here not long ago, a month ago. And they shared that they really suffered when they came here. They didn't have a place to live. They didn't have food. They didn't have any jobs. And they had a teenage daughter. I tried to connect them with school, so the girl is starting school in August. And also, my parents had a company, so we hired her for the crew, and she's with us, working. And every Saturday at 10am, she comes to our food pantry, because she said it's a big help for the family.

**PRAYER:** Dear Great and Gracious God: We give you thanks for these partnerships you've created in us - founded on relationships and getting to know one another, and the joys and even the struggles as we walk together through this life, getting to experience life from another person's perspective and learning about how they see the world. Bless us in our ministries, in our relationships, in our partnerships, that we may continue to strengthen each other and even more importantly, grow closer to you. We thank you for all these things. In your name we pray, Amen.

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**Wednesday, March 6**  
**RACINE VOCATIONAL MINISTRY**  
**“HEARING GOD’S CALL”**

*Content Advisory: This devotion includes references to childhood trauma, suicide, terminal illness and substance misuse.*

**Jim Schatzman:** Good morning! I am Jim Schatzman, Executive Director of Racine / Kenosha Vocational Ministry. We work with people returning from prison who are in programming to become restored members of the community.

Debra came to RVM in 2018. She says of her youth, “I was hardheaded. I had two loving, stable parents but I thought I could do whatever I wanted.” She led a life of drugs and alcohol that put her in and out of group homes and bounced around in the foster system. She had four children by the age of 21 and her street life showed no signs of slowing down. By age 23 she did her first stay in prison. She had two more prison sentences before she decided that she had had enough. Debra then felt a call from the Lord and began to do street ministry. She ministered to anyone who would listen and felt so alive! She enrolled in college and was well into her bachelor’s degree when tragedy struck. In a short span of time, three of her four children died. Her son hung himself in the Ethan Allen School for Boys, Her daughter died of a drug overdose. Another daughter, who was suffering with AIDS, died of cervical cancer. And Debra required surgery. She was devastated! Following surgery, she was prescribed pain killers that inadvertently led her back into her addiction.

Again, she began rebuilding her life, this time with RVM at her side. She said in an interview, “I love my case manager and I know she loves me!” This relationship and her commitment to herself put Debra back on the path to wholeness. She began pursuing her drug and alcohol certificate and took a position at a regional methadone clinic. She has hopes of going on for her Master’s degree. After three years at the clinic, Debra applied for a job at RVM. She is now a highly regarded member of our team with a focus on the homeless population. Debra said to us last week, “I am so excited about what God is doing. I just wait on him and do what he says.” Debra is now using her transforming life to pay it forward in her local community.

In Luke 13, Jesus tells a parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, then you can cut it down.’” Someone had to give Debra one more year!

In her new life she is truly an asset to the community. Many thanks to OFH and all of the parishes and members who support this work through donations of time and talents!

**PRAYER:** Almighty God: You alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners. Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise... that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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**Thursday, March 7**  
**REDEEMER LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE**

**Jeff Bray:** [Plays instrumental piano music.]

**Pastor Lisa Bates-Froiland:** Hi! Pastor Lisa Bates-Froiland from Redeemer Lutheran on Wisconsin Avenue at 19th Street. And we're happy to be a partner congregation with Outreach for Hope.

I'm sitting here in what I've come to call 'the seat of vulnerability.' In my twelve and a half years of serving here, I've seen people come and sit in this place and look pretty agitated. And something's going on, and it's a tough place for them to be. And yet they've come, and they're sitting right here in the front of things.

And it's a great thing to be a church that knows how to welcome a stranger. And also, because of the support of Outreach for Hope congregations, it's not just a "Welcome! How are you? Peace be with you." It's also, "Hey, do you need something to eat? Is there some kind of coat that we can leave you with today?" It's that full welcome of the stranger that I think the Bible mandates us to do... Welcome the stranger, and bridge them from whatever spot they are, to where God intends them to be.

**Jeff:** [Plays instrumental piano music.]

**PRAYER:** Great and Gracious God: Through your Spirit, you give us both the desire and the strength to fulfill your purpose in our lives. Grant us the grace of generous hearts and open hands, that our living and our giving may be acceptable in your sight. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

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**Friday, March 8**  
**INCARNATION LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE**  
**“BODY OF CHRIST”**

**Pr. Karen Kuttler:** My name is Pastor Karen Kuttler. I'm the Pastor of Incarnation Lutheran Church.

A reading from scripture, Ephesians 4: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Amen.

**PRAYER:** Healer God: Bless us with your love and care in times of struggle. Help us to walk together and support one another in our sorrow, so that we might heal together as one body in Christ. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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