



Bridges of Hope: Reflections on the Power of Partnership

2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS

Week 5
(March 11 - 15)



Monday, March 11
LIVING FAITH LUTHERAN, RACINE
THE COMMUNITY MEAL

Pastor Justin Kierzek: Greetings to you from Living Faith Lutheran Church in Racine. And thank you to everyone from Outreach for Hope for your help with the Community Meal! The Community Meal serves as one of our bridges to the community, as well as a variety of participating churches who really make this meal possible. Cris Bahr is one of the three employees who work to coordinate and run the Community Meal, and they do that every Sunday, all year round. Now she's going to share a little bit more about the meal.

Cris Bahr: Hi, my name is Cris Bahr.

Teresa Miranda: I'm Teresa Miranda.

Cris: And we are two of the coordinators for the Community Meal held every Sunday at Living Faith Lutheran Church in Racine. We just wanted to tell you a little bit about our program. We've been going for over 20 years. We started out at a different church - that church was sold, and we moved to this church. And one thing that I really want to point out, and I'm very happy to say, is that all during COVID, we kept our program going. And that's where it started out - where we started hanging out to-go meals. Prior to that, we would have sit-down meals in this dining room. And people would bring delicious food, homemade food, and all of our guests would line up and put their food on a tray and come in here and sit. So, we had, like, a very nice social event, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Cris: And so, ever since COVID, though, we have been offering to-go meals. We serve anywhere from 120 to 150 people every Sunday. And a lot of them we get to know very well, because we see them all the time. So, they're like our other family.

Teresa: Yeah.

Cris: Yes! So, I personally feel very blessed that I'm able to do this job. I've been doing it myself for over 20 years. I think... around 20 years. And I really love it, and I love all the participation we get from our churches. So, let me mention our churches: Lord of Life Lutheran from Kenosha, United Lutheran in Racine, Trinity Lutheran in Racine, Mount Pleasant Lutheran, Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Bethania... I said Living Faith... and Redeemer...

Teresa: We have some families that do it on their own as well. I think it's a benefit to society, because now we're getting kids who come up, who are with their families to get meals.

Cris: Yeah.

Teresa: And we're seeing newer people. I'm seeing a lot of new people now.

Cris: Yeah. And we wanted to mention our food pantry - we kind of work in coordination with them. If Teresa and I have to make a meal because we don't have a particular group signed up that Sunday, the food bank gives us food a lot of times - or, you know, helps us out so that we can provide a meal. So, they help us out a lot. If we happen to have food left over - which, mainly we haven't - but we put it in that refrigerator. And then Margaret makes sure that it's passed out to the people that come and pick up food. So, none of our food goes to waste. We recycle everything as much as we can. We have earth-friendly containers now.

Teresa: Yep!

Cris: We have earth-friendly silverware, bamboo silverware. So, we're trying to be good to Earth, and trying to walk in the steps of Jesus as much as we can. So, Amen and thank you very much!

Pr. Justin: The Community Meal feeds our neighbors, but it also feeds our souls. Serving our neighbors in the Community Meal has meant learning more about them. Working with fellow churches has meant experiencing collaboration that reminds all of us that Church isn't limited to one building. If we work together, there's no limit to what God can do through us! So again, thank you Outreach for Hope for helping the Community Meal hosted here at Living Faith, to continue to be that bridge - both to our community and to the other churches without whom this meal would not be possible.

PRAYER: Lord God: Help us to see you in each other, in the stranger, in the person we meet passing by. Help us to know how deeply you love each of us and call us to love each other as well. Bless us to love each other as you have shown us how to love. 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 12
FAITH/SANTA FE LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE
“SERVICE”

Pr. German Novelli: *[Translated from Spanish.]* The choice of the Gospel of Mark 1:29-39 for this Sunday shows us how people came to Jesus late at night, and the Lord served them with healing and deliverance. There, Jesus is modeling for each of us the mission that, as sons and daughters of God, we must undertake in the name of our savior.

Santa Fe Church of Milwaukee presents that opportunity, so that many people can join this bridge of hope and joy. How? By serving our community. Serving with the Gospel through the food pantries. Serving through music classes. Serving with the ministry, we develop to serve families in conflict. Many opportunities for each of you. We invite you to come in the name of Jesus to serve with the Gospel!

PRAYER: Heavenly God: As our Creator, you know us better than anyone else. Throughout our life, you have helped us form relationships. Remind us that you are at the center of these connections. Help us resolve any conflicts we may experience and continually remember to forgive as we are forgiven. May we look to you for wisdom and guidance, love and hope. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Wednesday, March 13
HEPHATHA LUTHERAN, MILWAUKEE
& JUST ONE MORE MEAL MINISTRY

Pr. Mary Martha Kannass: God's peace to you, Outreach for Hope, as we go through this Lenten journey together, and greetings from the Hephatha altar. All the young men here are leaders in the church and leaders in the community, connected together in the bridge that Just One More Meal ministry makes between us as the church and the community that we serve. The meal of Holy Communion, the Bread of Life. Just One More Meal ministry makes that bridge of life in so many important ways in our ministry, Strong Baby Sanctuary, connections for families to have things that they need to take care of their children, and in countless other ways.

Alexander Pechauer Bates: I have had the pleasure of being a part of Just One More Ministry as a worker since March of 2023. Before that, I was just picking up an order for Strong Baby Sanctuary. And it's been a wonderful experience... I love helping people. And being a part of JOMM helps me serve people. I'm feeding people who really needs it. And it's a wonderful experience. You know, I love it a lot... I love helping people.

Zion Moore: But honestly, what's been even crazier is seeing how JOMM has took this church to the next level when it comes to helping out the community. And that's one thing I feel like, ever since I've been a kid, this church has prided itself around. And the fact that they just intermingled, and just connected like that instantly, and were able to elevate the community is what means the most to me. So, like, I'm thinking about how much I cared-- I couldn't even tell you. But how much of an impact I've made? Very big impact. How much impact JOMM has made? Very big impact. Amazing.

Aayreon Bates: I'd probably say I carried around, probably.. running like 5000 pounds of food here. Also picked up food from JOMM. It's a nice place. They also, they do a lot with Hephatha. Feeding us. Helping us feed the homeless. They do a lot for us.

Pr. Mary Martha: Let's say how much fun it is to compete when you're trying to carry more than everybody else and they're trying to carry more than you! (laughs) Healthy competition!

LaQuon Johnson: There be a lot of stuff that we have to carry for Strong Baby Sanctuary. And I'd say that like, all that probably helped so many women that has babies, that's probably in need of diapers, food, water, clothing. Without JOMM, there wouldn't be a lot of help around our community over here for women that's in need. So, that's cool.

Pr. Mary Martha: As we continue through our Lenten journey, we thank God for reforming us in the Holy Meal as the Body of Christ, bringing us together through those bridges that God makes. Certainly one of those important bridges for us is our partnership with Just One More Meal ministry, and the

bridge it allows us to create into our community in general. We're grateful, Outreach for Hope. God bless you!

PRAYER: Dear Great and Gracious God: Help us make your priorities our priorities, and to put our faith into action. Help us plan to "give back" the talents, treasures and time with which we have been blessed. Help us plan to serve our church, our community, and our world with your gifts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Thursday, March 14
HOPE CENTER, WAUKESHA - "BEGINNINGS"

Pastor Roy Nelson: I'm Roy Nelson with Hope Center in Waukesha. This organization is built on partnership.

Fifty years ago, six pastors from different churches in Waukesha got together to try and figure out how to better care for the folks who came by their church offices during the week looking for assistance. And they came up with this concept called Cooperating Congregations of Waukesha. And they worked it out of the congregations for a while, for like 30 years. They were working out of their various churches, and it grew into - one church had a clothing shop, where all the clothing was donated then given away. And another church had a meal program, where the food was donated and prepared, and everybody got free meals, anybody who showed up. So, they were doing that for 30 years.

Then they had to consolidate, because things grew beyond their wildest imaginations. So, they bought an old funeral home in Waukesha, converted that into a day center with a meal program and a clothing shop - and some, of course, supportive services offices. And they operated in that for 16 years. And now we are in the building you see behind me. We just moved in. Hope Center now has four times the space that it had before. This little partnership for six churches now has 160 partner congregations, has governmental partnerships with the county and the city, and other nonprofits in the area. It's all partnership! And what we do is, we take care of the poor as we move them into temporary housing, and then permanent housing, and then we also help them remain housed.

So, one of the things that I think is special about Hope Center is that our guests see this as their ministry as well. And they want to help out. Our guests become our volunteers in a lot of instances. Especially with Project Move, which is where we deliver furniture. Furniture gets donated - furniture, appliances, household items get donated - we pick them up and deliver them. Our guests want to help with that! So, you know, they come in, they use the day center, they get food, they get clothing - but then they give back by delivering furniture with Project Move. And also, we have guests, people who started out as guests, who are on staff. So, the ministry of Hope Center becomes the ministry of the guests, and then the guests become the workers doing the ministry for others.

It's all about the partnerships! And we build bridges for hope here at Hope Center in Waukesha.

PRAYER: Gracious God: Hope rises when we come together as partners, when we are centered on your love and goodness. Bless us in our efforts, that faith, hope and love would grow in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Friday, March 15
EMAUS ELCA, RACINE - "COMMUNITY"

Barb McCloskey: Hi, Carol!

Carol Beltran: How ya doing?

Barb: Good! Listen, I just need to tell you something...

Carol: What's that, Barb?

Barb: Well, I want to thank you for getting me involved in the community here at Emaus. Since I've become a member here, my life has been so good.

Carol: How so?

Barb: Well, remember when you hired me for Neighborhood Camp?

Carol: I sure do! That was a great moment.

Barb: Yeah, well, it was a great experience. And it was a friend of mine that steered me in the right direction to get to you. And then you hired me. And then I went through the experience. And it was right after my husband died, and I really needed to do something. I'd been sitting in a chair for about three months. And Camp was very good for me!

Carol: You being there was very good for us! You helped me out as well.

Barb: Yeah, well, thanks... But that was just the beginning of my introduction here. Remember?

Carol: I remember!

Barb: I came in on a Wednesday. And I turned in all my books, and all the money and cards that were leftover and whatnot. And you said to me, "Well, what are you going to do now Barb?" And I said, "Well... I don't know. I suppose crochet in my chair, still." And you said, "I want you to meet some people-"

Carol: "-Come with me."

Barb: Yes. Come with me. Boy, oh, boy! That was... that was a good trip down to the basement.

Carol: You didn't know what you're getting in for, did ya?

Barb: No, but it was wonderful things. The stitchers were meeting that day. And these are the ladies that make the quilts here. And I don't quilt, but I do

crochet. And so, they needed me to make scarves for a lot of hats that some other lady had made.

Carol: And where do those scarves and hats go?

Barb: Well, I... I'm still waiting for the day to see one of 'em walk down the street! But I've made about 200 pairs, and I'll make mittens. And they're for the less fortunate children in our area. And we send them to food pantries where people can get other things besides food, too. So, it's been a wonderful ministry to be with that group... And that's not the only thing [laughs]!

Carol: Never is when God's involved.

Barb: Yeah, that's for sure... Well, a couple of months, we had a pop-up choir, and I sang in that. And next thing, you know, I'm part of the group. And I've never been in a group where you didn't have to prove yourself. You just had to be. And that's what Emaus was for me. So now I'm cantering, thanks to you! I've always loved to sing, but I never figured I'd be doing that.

Carol: And it's a blessing here at the church to have you with us! I couldn't be more happy. God moves in mysterious ways. And I'm so thankful that he pushed me that day, to ask more questions of you, and to not just let you walk out of the office. It was a blessing for both of us, Barb.

Barb: It was! It was. And now I have a family that I never knew I needed. And... the last five years have opened a lot of things for me.

Carol: I remember, if I'm correct, that prior to you coming here, you had reservations about the Church as a whole?

Barb: Yes. Well, you know, I had kind of made the circuit of churches in Racine. And it always seemed like I was good enough when I could do something for them... but when it was reciprocal, it didn't happen. There wasn't anybody from our church that visited us when Ken was sick, and we could've used that.

Carol: I'm grateful that the Spirit worked, Barb, and that you found a place now, in the church and in your life, and that your relationship with God now is everything that you want it to be. And I couldn't feel more blessed to be a part of your life and your journey. And I thank God every day for everything he's done for you and for this church as a community.

Barb: Thank you! You are... very special.

Carol: May God bless you this journey, and may God bless everybody this Lenten journey. And always remember that in the midst of all darkness and when things seem bleak, that there is always light. We just need to take time to look for it, because trust me... in that darkness, Jesus waits for us, and He is there, and He is the light.

Barb: Amen!

PRAYER: Extravagant God: We thank you for the amazing grace and mercy you have freely given to us. Give us grateful hearts that we may share your love. Amen.

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