

Feeding those in Need: A Franciscan Tradition

Feeding the hungry and providing nourishment has always been a part of the ministries of the Franciscan Sisters, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. From the inception of the congregation, obtaining food, sharing food, and having adequate food were issues our Sisters dealt with on a daily basis both for those they served and for themselves. These issues intensified during times of war, famine, and disease. Sr. Audrey Marie Rothweil has documented the struggles well in her history of the Congregation. In Germany, France, the Netherlands, and later in the United States, the Sisters would beg for food or would be given food in "payment" and gratitude for their loving service. The Sisters always fed those in their charge first; the orphans, the sick, the children in their schools, and the young women in their residences. After all were fed, the Sisters would then eat from what remained.

There is a moving story in Sr. Theodora Brockmann's history of the St. Clare Province. Sr. Theodora was an eye-witness to the early years of St. Clare's Province, arriving in this country in 1875. She was part of the early Province's leadership team. The year was 1877 and St. Boniface Hospital, the first hospital of our Province, had just burned to the ground. Sr. Theodora writes; "The Sisters lost all they possessed; it was hard to bear, but with holy Job they exclaimed, 'The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, His holy name be praised.'"

Eight days later, the Sisters with Mother Bernarda Passmann as their leader, found temporary housing in a rented apartment within the Holy Trinity Parish of St. Louis. The rented space had no furniture. The Sisters attended Mass the morning after their arrival, the Feast of the Assumption. Their breakfast consisted of stale bread they had carried with them on the journey. Again, Sr. Theodora records, "This was a day never to be forgotten by Mother Bernarda and the pioneer Sisters. As long as Mother Bernarda lived and for many years after her death, the anniversary was observed as a fast day, the breakfast consisting of dry bread and water, during the partaking of which one of the pioneer Sisters recounted the hardships of the foundation."

The great gardens that were carefully planted and tended by our Sisters at the orphanages and hospitals speak volumes about the Sisters' priority of providing nourishing food for those they served.



(The picture above captures a portion of the mural done by Sherry Posselt, depicting the history of St. Elizabeth Hospital in Appleton, Wisconsin, from 1899 through present day.)

In recent times, the Donation Committee has supported agencies with a focus on food from local food banks to international agencies that fight world hunger. Nourishment in the form of providing food, hospitality, welcome, and warmth is a hallmark of the Motherhouse. Many of us have fond and sustaining memories of Sister Leander Huesling and Sister Timothy Scharenborg extending special hospitality.

Sometimes, the Sisters take the hospitality with them and disperse it through a local agency. Sr. Mary Patrick Salm and Sr. Julie Walsh served as volunteers at the Interfaith Food Pantry in Carol Stream, IL., assisting folks to choose foods from the pantry and including a surprise or two in a bag. (Photo below.)



Some of our Sisters have offered their Franciscan hospitality at PADS or People's Resource Center. PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) is an agency in DuPage County directed by Covenant Member, Carol Simler, providing services (food, clothing, shelter, transitional housing, life skills and job skills training) to people who are homeless. Sr. Thomas Kolba was the first Wheaton Franciscan to volunteer to prepare meals for guests at PADS in 1992. Food donated to PADS is prepared by volunteers. Sr. Thomas wrote about her experience in 1992 News Chips, "This ministry I find very rewarding. In some way, it is fulfilling my desire of many years ago when I chose nursing as a career. This ministry gives me a new kind of energy and life that had been shelved during the years I spent in education, administration, or governance. I feel I am using my God-given talents and gifts in serving others who are less fortunate than myself. I am indeed grateful."

When Sr. Thomas retired from the ministry in 1996, Sr. Timothy Scharenborg, Sr. Mary Patrick Salm, Sr. Julianne Diebold, Sr. Jane Hermus, Sr. Bernardine Brunnert and CM Joan Goblet continued the work Sr. Thomas had started.



The Wheaton Franciscans served the noon meal on Thursdays until 2005. The Sisters donated food they prepared themselves. They would pack up food from OLA in boxes and load up the cars to take to PADS. Salads, desserts, and beverage were served along with the main course. The meal was served from 11:30-12:30 with clean-up following.

Sr. Timothy reflects on her time of service by saying, "We enjoyed our time at PADS very much. The guests and staff were always so grateful, helpful and friendly. We miss this ministry, but we continue to pray for the homeless and for PADS so that the excellent work they provide will continue to help God's poor."

Joan Goblet reports that Thursdays soon became the busiest days of the month. Seventy to eighty people would often come for Thursday's meals because of the good food and the loving service of the Sisters. Long after the Sisters stopped providing the Thursday meals, Joan states, "The guests were always asking for Sr. Timothy and the other Sisters because they loved them."

Joan now volunteers at People's Resource Center in the Food Pantry "because I like to feed people and nourish others." One meaningful way Joan shows her love for the Sisters by making bread once or twice a month and bringing it to the motherhouse. Everyone knows Joan has made her delivery by the heavenly smells. Actually, Joan started the loving ministry because of the many precious memories some of the Sisters hold of their mothers baking bread. Though she is unable to eat flour products herself, Joan bakes the bread and gives it all away to the Sisters, her family, and friends.

Covenant Member, Shirley Justin Wolf continues the Wheaton Franciscan tradition by serving a meal at PADS the first Thursday of the month. Shirley has organized a group of four women to serve an entrée, dessert, and salad.

Shirley said she tried different recipes until the guests' favorite was identified. The Tater Tot meal, consisting of ground meat, Tater Tot potatoes, and mushrooms in a mushroom soup and cheese sauce, is a recipe adapted by Shirley from a meal her family enjoyed. Shirley says of her ongoing ministry, "It is a great thing to do. I love it!" Nourishing the body is essential but feeding the soul can be life-giving. We are grateful for their service!