

Hungering for Food and Justice

By Fred Boehrer and Diana Conroy

When our doorbell rings, we do not know who we will greet at Emmaus House. As a Catholic Worker house in the South End of Albany, life has a rhythm built on unpredictability. At our front door, we will welcome a parish group dropping off groceries for our humble food pantry. A few hours later, someone will stop by in need of food. Some families come to donate school supplies. Later, other families will ring our doorbell to prepare their children for the new school year.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry?” (Matt. 25:44) For years, our young children sat side by side at the dinner table with homeless families we were living with. One year, we ate the first harvest of local sweet corn when we hosted a farmworker family. The freshly picked corn arrived at Emmaus House the day before it shipped to local supermarkets. Personally knowing who harvested the very corn we were eating - and sitting side-by-side with him - was a blessed moment. Thanks to Roxbury Farms, a lot of yummy vegetables are growing in our Emmaus House garden and in other South End plots.

There are so many gospel accounts of Jesus centering on food. These include the feeding of the five thousand, Simon Peter’s mother-in-law preparing a meal after being healed, and of course, the Last Supper. We are invited to give thanks (“eucharist”) as we gather around the table and recognize how Christ is present in each other. As we shift away from the COVID pandemic, and gather with more people around tables, we are invited to see Christ with those whom we are breaking bread.

Since 1996, we have raised three children at Emmaus House, while assisting families in need. Our low-income neighborhood looks very differently from the middle-class homes where we grew up. We experience both the joy of community and the challenges of gun violence, empty buildings and unmet mental health needs.

At Emmaus House, people not only yearn for food, they also hunger for justice. Dorothy Day, as co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, emphasized the need to offer both works of mercy and works of justice.

In addition to standing in solidarity with longtime residents of Albany, we advocate for our immigrant neighbors. Like the Kelly Lattimore icon depicting Dorothy Day accompanying an immigrant family (as our Holy Family), we have walked beside newly arriving neighbors. We have challenged the systems which mistreat immigrants. Emmaus House volunteers have accompanied people to immigration courts in both Buffalo and New York City. We have assisted pro bono immigration attorneys to collect information to help local asylum seekers gain long term status. We have held public vigils to pray for compassionate immigration reform. Years ago, we set up a grass-roots, immigrant-visitation program at the Albany county jail.

Many immigrant families have lived with us at Emmaus House, too. For us, works of mercy and social justice are intertwined – two sides of the same coin. Together, through prayer, study and action, we are able to feed Christ through serving and advocating with our neighbor. Just as Jesus nourishes us through those who ring our doorbell.



(To receive more information about the Albany Catholic Worker house, please email:

catholicworkeralbany@gmail.com or call: 518-492-4966. Donations may be mailed to: Emmaus House, 45 Trinity Place, Albany, NY 12202. Fred and Diana are also available to speak with parish groups about their Catholic Worker ministry.)