

# Saint Thomas of Canterbury Outreach Ministry Newsletter



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Winter 2021

## Reopening to Changes Great and Small

Guests are returning to the soup kitchen to sit down and eat, but that doesn't mean things have entirely returned to normal at St. Thomas of Canterbury Outreach Ministries.

The soup kitchen opened for indoor dining on July 16, but masks remain a staple for volunteers and for guests, at least before they receive their food. Chairs and seating are more widely spaced to maintain social distancing, and two sets of fans roar to keep air circulating through the open windows of the basement.

And some faces are missing. Long-time volunteers related recently that guests they used to see regularly before COVID-19 stopped coming over the course of the pandemic. Neither they nor those visitors' friends among other soup kitchen guests know why. And they have no means of finding out.

It's a microcosm of life as it emerges slowly from the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic – portions of old routines returning, but with gaps that cannot be easily restored. In 2019, the soup kitchen saw approximately 98 guests per night. Now it sees anywhere from 60 to 70 guests per night, with fluctuations.

But in the meantime, the need for the outreach ministries – and the hospitality and help they provide – continues unabated.

The food pantry – operated in partnership with Catholic Charities – changed its hours of operation in February from Tuesday and Friday to Monday and Thursday. Since then, it has seen an increase in households from 200-250 households monthly to **almost 700 households**, which translates to **1,000 individuals**, monthly. Client choice will begin in 2022, but for now, they are still served pre-packaged bags, with choices on fruits and vegetables and meat (*pictured on the front page*).

Since April, the soup kitchen has served more than **3,000 people with about 5,664 meals**, including take-home meals and second servings.

Those numbers resonate because they represent people who require help for the basic necessities of human dignity, even as the neighborhood evolves.

And as Jesus will always be present in the least of His brothers, St. Thomas of Canterbury will always strive to do what it can to serve Him among them.



**Prayer for the soup kitchen has been part of our outreach since the 1980s. Every Tuesday night, there is a Holy Hour for the soup kitchen in church while guests are being served downstairs.**

## SUPPORT OUR MINISTRIES

### St. Thomas of Canterbury Soup Kitchen Needs Fall/Winter 2021-2022

#### Perishables

Onions  
Celery  
Carrots  
Potatoes  
Romaine Lettuce  
Yogurt  
Milk  
Fresh Fruit  
Any type of Boneless Meat

#### Non-Perishables

Tomato Paste  
Granola bars  
Snacks  
Crackers  
Desserts  
Cookies  
Rolls  
Sandwich bread  
Bottled water  
Coffee  
Face Masks  
Warm socks/gloves/hats  
Hand sanitizer  
Lotion  
Toothbrushes/toothpaste

Please drop off at the St. Thomas Rectory on  
Tuesdays and Fridays from 2:00-3:30 pm  
773-878-5507  
4827 N. Kenmore Ave., Chicago

### Students return

#### By the Numbers

**3,008** guests served at the Soup  
Kitchen

**5,664** meals served, including take-  
home and seconds

**1,000** individuals served per month  
by the food pantry

Students from Loyola Academy in Wilmette, IL, and Loyola University in Chicago returned to partner with St. Thomas as soup kitchen volunteers, and their presence has been “a wonderful and inspiring contribution to our volunteer team,” said Jennifer Franco, coordinator of outreach volunteers at St. Thomas of Canterbury.

“We continue to be grateful for all of our volunteers for their charity, dedication, and service in providing for those who come to the soup kitchen,” she added. “We are also grateful for all of those who donate food or money to the soup kitchen because we could not continue without their generous support.”

## Promoting Dignity and Sustainability

- The food pantry will move indoors to the school building this winter. This change was made possible by generous donations from the Order of Malta, parishioners of Mary, Mother of God Parish and Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish Catholic Church in Wilmette.



Setting up for the Food Pantry outside the garage at St. Thomas. At present, guests enter at the front of the property, receive food at the garage door, and exit through the gate.



Students from the Christian Life community of Loyola University Chicago made an enormously generous donation to the food pantry in November. Thank you for your service and generosity!

- In September, the soup kitchen began a food rescue program to help meet its needs for fresh food. This has provided us with bread, meat, produce and donuts (which our guests love) from local stores.
- In 2022, the food pantry will move to a client-choice model that allows guests to choose their own items as in a grocery store. It's a mode of operation that provides a more dignified experience for those in need.
- The food pantry's partnerships with the Greater Chicago Food Depository, St. Norbert's, Hunger Resource Network, Berna Foundation, Richards Building Supply and other donors allow us to give out turkeys, hams, and whole chickens with non-perishable items for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Thank you so much to all whose generosity supports our work!

## Meet a Volunteer:

### Gloria and Martin

#### How long have you been volunteering at the soup kitchen at St. Thomas?

**Gloria:** About 15 years- we started in the fall of '06, because we moved here in the summer of '06.

**Martin:** Part of it was that I went to college with Jim Eder [temporary director of the soup kitchen].

**Gloria:** But we weren't aware of it until we saw it in the [St. Thomas] bulletin. So we started volunteering at the pantry and the soup kitchen. But they were on the same days.

**Martin:** We were younger then!

#### How are things different now that the soup kitchen has reopened from COVID?

**Gloria:** It's very different. It's much more organized. I don't want to say rigidly organized, [but] it used to be very Catholic Worker-loose. But there's always enough. And there were always students, which I think is a big perk, personally. It's good for us to be among young people, and it's inspiring to see people who give, young people who are committed to things.

#### What's your favorite story from volunteering?

**Gloria:** There was a man [who was] homeless. He would sit and talk to me sometimes. He had been to California, he mentioned, and I said: Why don't you go back there in the winter? No, [he said] he likes the lake, because it's accessible. I said: Doesn't it get awfully cold? He said: Well, only when you first wake up but once you start walking, it's okay.

He came [to the soup kitchen] for several years, and got a job at Lincoln Park Zoo in the concession

building and saved his money and got a room. He would still come to the soup kitchen to save his money and got a job at a hospital as a housekeeping person overnight. Then he had to stop coming to soup, except maybe very rarely on a day off, but I saw him on an L platform before COVID, a couple years before COVID. And he was still working and doing well.

**Martin:** He used to come with two enormous backpacks, one on the front and one his back-carrying all his possessions.

**Gloria:** I don't know what his story was. But he was determined, and he made it.



## Reflecting on the Corporal Works of Mercy

*“For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison, and you visited me.”*

*Matthew 25:35-36*

This Gospel verse, describing the deeds of the righteous for which Jesus promises “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” is the foundation of the corporal works of mercy: Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, bury the dead, give alms to the poor.

The adjective “corporal” – meaning “of the human body” – is crucial to understanding these works. They are not nebulous dispositions or feelings of sympathy at the sight of the downtrodden. They are aid provided to the hungry person that we encounter, to the sick person that we know, to the stranger that we encounter, to those in need of food or clothing in our community. In other words, we do not have to travel far to find those in need, or find Christ in them. He is present in every need that we encounter, in every person who lacks the necessities of human life.

But we miss the point of these works if we see them only as a checklist to avoid damnation. The response of the righteous is to ask Jesus: “When did we see you hungry and feed you?”

We must always remember that when we give to the poor out of our surplus, we are answering the needs of justice. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church cites St. Gregory the Great: “When we attend to the needs of the poor, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice.”

The righteous know this about feeding, clothing, caring for, welcoming, and visiting the poor. We do not provide these things out of our magnanimity and

generosity, but because the poor have a right to them as persons created in the image and likeness of God. The corporal works of mercy should always be done with humility, because we are fulfilling justice in providing them, and all too often, only partially. And they must always be done in love, because in living out the corporal works of mercy, we are ministering to Him who is Love Itself.

The Church’s social teaching emphasizes over and over again a preferential option for the poor because Christ identified himself with the least of these. Our own small deeds can never repay the debt of Love crucified on the cross, and the righteous know this. It is why they ask Jesus at the Last Judgment when they ever helped him.

But if our assistance to the poor is done with love, then it takes on a worth beyond its material impact. As St. Therese of Lisieux wrote in *Story of a Soul*, “Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.”

Carried out with love, our small works of mercy will be transformed by Christ into wonders, so marvelous that will be hard to recognize when it is presented again at the Last Judgment, as help accepted humbly and lovingly by Him who is in truth our help and our Savior.