

The Oratorian

JOY-FILLED HEARTS & MINISTRY SET HEARTS ON FIRE



Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen Fills More Than One Need

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Catherine Sullivan laughs when describing the humble beginnings of the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen. “That first day, we had everything set up. Br. Boone of the Oratory had gotten us a wonderful location. We were raring to go. And guess what? No one showed up.”

Founded in 1986 by a coordinating committee of two Catholic laywomen (Sullivan and Beverly Carroll), two Oratorian brothers (Brs. Boone and Guyon) and an Oratorian priest (Fr. Valtierra) in Rock Hill, the soup kitchen immediately filled a hole in the community for service and social aid. But it soon became clear that it filled not just a hole in resources, but a hole in individual hearts as well. In fully Philipian fashion, volunteers treat guests like family: joking, conversing, sharing space and faith, joys and sorrows.

Carroll commented that it wasn't just empty stomachs that got filled day in and day out at the soup kitchen. “It's hearts,” she said. Current director, Jan Stephenson, agreed, adding that the volunteers needed the kitchen as much as the guests.

Hearts, after all, need to be filled as much as stomachs, and oftentimes those needing a good meal need just as much to be seen and loved as individuals as well.

Regeana Phillips, volunteer, who often helped out at the large holiday meals served annually, said, “We serve anyone, we serve a hot meal. We don't ask questions. Takeaway? You can take a meal to someone else, again, no questions. Anyone who wants to volunteer, you know, is always welcome. And anyone who needs a meal? Boy, are you welcome. We got plenty.”

But as Stephenson remarked, volunteers have needed the space as much as guests. Over 90% of donations come from within the immediate community, showing just how much volunteers have invested their hearts and practical means in the venture.

Another volunteer, Strait Herron, the former South Pointe High School football team's coach, brought his players for years to help pack and take meals to the home-bound.

“We want to invite and embrace everyone,” she said, “We don’t preach religion, we live it.”

“Every year I’ve done this, [we’ve] had more player support, involvement. My guys get the food, lift it, take it out to the drivers.”

“It’s grown with parent support. But you can tell, once they get here, they sort of take ownership...that feeling of doing something for someone else. They want to come back.”

But the kitchen had a harrowing setback in 2020 when COVID-19 had the city debating shutting down bus service, and the rotation of cheerful volunteers – many of them past retirement – all at once stepped back. “Of course they would,” was the response from the soup kitchen coordinators and founders. But at the same time, “Of course we weren’t shutting down either.”

More needed than ever, but now unable to serve guests indoors, The Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen coordinators took stock. Andrew Dys at the Rock Hill Herald covered the closure, writing, “Soup kitchen served hot lunch for 34 years...closed because of a germ.”

The first Wednesday in April, the kitchen shut down. Then president of the board of directors, Tim Helline, stated to news outlets, “I am broken-hearted that we have to close temporarily, but this is best for our guests and our volunteers, ‘I feel horrible. These people we serve... they need others. They need us.’”

Miraculously, the kitchen was closed not even a month before opening up again May 6 with a small band of healthy, highly-conscientious volunteers working long days to serve to-go- lunches 7 days a week. A drive-thru for cars was set up, and a

walk-through for those on foot or on bicycles was set up also.

But the kitchen ran on a skeleton crew.

With just 7 volunteers, they kept the kitchen going 7 days a week until 2021, when the kitchen opened again for in-person seating and service.

Today, the thriving soup kitchen often provides meals for over a hundred guests a day. But if anyone had projected that number to their meager crew nearly 40 years ago, it would have been hard to imagine it.

“We’re extremely well-connected, and a lot of people come here needing more than a good meal and a friendly face,” said Stephenson, director of the kitchen. To this point, she references Saint Mary’s, which shares space at the same site with the kitchen, and provides many other social services.

Also in tune with local government, the rotating leadership of Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen arranged for the city bus to stop at the kitchen twice a day. “Not so easily, but we did it!” Stephenson said.

Though founded by Catholics, and supported and founded by the Oratorians of Rock Hill, Stephenson is quick to clarify that the kitchen is “fully ecumenical and denominationally unaffiliated.”

“We want to invite and embrace everyone,” she said, “We don’t preach religion, we live it.”

This seems right in line with Saint Philip Neri’s example. Just as the humble priest met young men, families, the wealthy and the poor, in the public square, admonishing and comforting, so the Dorothy Day Soup

Kitchen meets people where they are – showing love, not babbling about it. “A heart beats, and you can feel it, but you don’t overthink it...thinking about it won’t make it beat better. But running and breathing will. We love, and that’s running and breathing for the soul,” said Day, the 20th century social activist who converted to Catholicism in her 30s.

Today, Rock Hill Oratory continues to support Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen, which as its guest numbers grow, is more and more in need. “We always get more out of this than the guests. We aren’t on different planes,” said Stephenson, “We are the same community.”

Jesus ate and drank with his disciples, with sinners, with the marginalized and outcast. It is no coincidence that the Eucharist is in the context of a meal. It is in a meal that we acknowledge our need: we need each other and we need an all-loving God. After many years of use the main kitchen and dining room at the Oratory needs major renovation. Electrical, plumbing, ventilation, and accessibility all need to meet current health and safety standards. The total cost will be \$150,000.

Our kitchen and dining area are at the heart of our community and ability to serve. We ask you joyfully to consider giving to this special project. A portion of your gift will go to the Soup Kitchen. Details on giving can be found in the Member section.

PROGRAMS:

The Center for Spirituality provides programs and retreats throughout the year. We also provide a place for private and small group retreats.

On May 18th, we held an online program, **Finding God on Spotify** (or on the Radio). The discussion was led by *Alice Camille* and *Carl McColman* and was a truly fun, musical event. (Check online to view the program recording!)

In July we had the Summer Bible Institute. For more than 40 years, we have gathered to study, reflect on and learn from Scripture. Our guides for this year's institute were *Maribeth Howell* and *Adrian Dominican*, who presented four evenings on *Encountering the Psalms*; and *Ronald Witherup*, former head of the Sulpicians and widely recognized biblical scholar, who presented four morning sessions on **Paul the Pastor: Rediscovering a Neglected Theme**.

Information on these and all our programs can be found on the Center for Spirituality page on the Oratory website: www.rockhilloratory.org. Please take a look – and join us when you can!

Upcoming Programs

October 7, 2023

Cardinal Newman Lecture

Online

Fr. Richard Sparks, C.S.P.

Creative Tensions in 2023

America: Three Related, Yet Distinct Theological Trends

October 13th - 14th

Carl McColeman

Spirituality of Social Justice

In Person & Online

Iconography Retreat, 2023



The Annual Iconography Retreat was held April 17-21. Father Damian Higgins, a Ukrainian Catholic priest and abbot of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in California, led a group of 13 people in the writing of an icon of St. Brigid of Kildare. Each participant took home a finished icon and learned more about this tradition of the Eastern Church, through the creative experience and prayer. Next year's retreat is already on the calendar!

SPIRITUALITY:

Philip Neri may be known as the Patron Saint of Joy, but that is directly due to his vital attention to Christian charity. For Philip, charity is always practical. Love is not abstract theology. Like the Lord himself, Philip knew that Incarnation and thus, presence and attention, is the secret of love.

A report made at Philip's canonization told of his visit to Clement VIII, who was suffering agony in his hands. There, he prayed for the pain to be removed, and it was. Upon returning home, he was asked about his mission to the sick. "I took away his pain," he said simply.

The other smiled, "I'm sure your visit removed much of his suffering."

But Philip looked him in the eye and said, "No. I really removed his pain. He is needed at the council tomorrow, and no one acts well in pain."

For Philip, charity is always practical.

While few of us may ever literally remove another's pain, there is not one of us who, if we follow Philip's example, cannot relieve a brother or sister's burden. May we always choose this cheerful, practical charity.

MEMBERS:

We hope that you will support the renovation financially, but more importantly participate more fully in the mission of Jesus Christ who ate and drank with his disciples, sinners, the suffering, marginalized and outcast. We have retained a commercial kitchen and hospitality firm to design and implement the renovation to ensure that everything is accessible, meeting every health & safety requirement. **The total cost is estimated at \$150,000.** Those who are able to contribute \$5,000 or more will be named on our lectern where daily prayers are offered

at meals and everyone who contributes will be named by the entrance. No matter what you contribute, your gift will continue to give in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine. **A portion of the funds will also go directly to the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen** to further the mission of reaching out to the most needy amongst us.



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