

# *Saturday Meals for the Community Ministry*

BY GIGI MILLER

In a recent sermon, Rev. Hannah Wilder asked us “What does hunger feel like?” On Saturday mornings at St. Andrew's, hunger feels like a home health care worker, already running late due to transportation issues, picking up the lunch which may be the only thing she eats all day. Or it could feel like a neighbor with behavioral issues needing to be vulnerable with someone. It could even feel like a volunteer having a stressful day receiving a friendly greeting from another neighbor. Hunger—whether of the physical, emotional, or spiritual variety—feels different for different folks.

For over 15 years, St. Andrew's has nourished the Encinitas community. Primarily intended for our housing and food insecure neighbors, we provided a multi-course, hot meal, cooked and served by volunteers, to anyone who walked through the Parish Hall doors.

We originally served lunch, complete with soup or salad, entrée with sides, and dessert, on Friday afternoons. When our Showers of Blessings friends started operating on Saturday mornings, we moved the meal to complement their offerings of shower, haircuts, and clean clothes. Our brunches were extravagant feasts with bacon, eggs, pancakes, hash browns, pastries, and fresh fruit. All meals were served on china with real silverware—no plastic cutlery or paper plates. Our volunteer teams of 8 to 10 dedicated folks came from a variety of Encinitas organizations and faith-based groups, including St. John's Catholic Church, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, the Encinitas Coastal Rotary, and Boy Scout Troop 777. Teams treated each other and our 60 to 80 weekly folks with compassion and respect.

Due to pandemic restrictions in March 2020, we stopped serving brunch in the Parish Hall. We moved to a socially distanced, bagged lunch model in September and, after a brief hiatus during the winter pandemic restrictions, are continuing with bagged lunches during the campus construction. Our smaller volunteer teams of 3 to 4 dedicated helpers serve a hearty lunch of freshly-made sandwiches, chips, dessert, portable yogurt, fruit, and other assorted goodies to approximately 25 neighbors every Saturday morning from 9 to 10:30 am. We plan to welcome friends and neighbors to our resumed brunch service in 2021 after construction is complete!

Through all the changes and adjustments, our emphasis on community building remained constant. We're called to reinforce the abundance of God's creation by serving food and showing love; on Saturday mornings, there's always enough of both to go around. So, what does community feel like? Maybe it's like the beautiful guitar solo I heard being played by one of our neighbors. When I thanked him for his wonderful offering, he said, “You all give so much to us. I want to be a part of it and give something too.” Community feels like the Holy Spirit filling bellies and souls.

If you'd like to know more about joining a Saturday morning team, feel free to contact [Gigi Miller at \[geegem@gmail.com\]\(mailto:Gigi.Miller@geegem@gmail.com\)](mailto:Gigi.Miller@geegem@gmail.com) for more information.

