

Luke House

Community News

The Newsletter of the Community Meal Program
Madison, Wisconsin, Christmas, 2010

A commitment becomes a way of life

When I first started serving meals at Luke House with my church group, it was a once-a-month commitment. I bought my assigned food items, got them to church, showed up at Luke House, served the meal, shared the meal, and then I went home and didn't think about Luke House for another month.

I had conversations with the folks who come to eat at Luke House. I noticed that on some days—particularly the sweltering days of summer and the sub-zero days of winter—the world seemed to be weighing more heavily on folks. I knew to be somewhat polite at the table. But, mostly, I didn't think very deeply about what went on at Luke House or the people who came to eat. I pretty much lacked empathy. I certainly didn't think much about strangers I ran into in the course of my day. Who has the time, anyway?

That all changed when I followed the suggestion of a lady from my church. She suggested that I pray before my once-a-month night at Luke House.

Just ask God to help you understand what you should do, she said.

I had been going to Luke House for several years at this point. One day after church, she had asked me about my experience at there. She'd been there when she was younger and wanted to know what I thought about it. I told her I was frustrated because I was often confused about what to say to people. That's when she suggested praying before arriving at Luke House.

So I started to do just that. I would pray as I drove over to Luke House: "God, help me to be a good servant. Be with me. Show me what you want me to do."

The first few months I did it I didn't notice any change in me except I was maybe a little bit quieter and listened a bit more to others. Over the next few months, I noticed that I talked less and less as I worked. When I was sitting down eating, I listened more and more. I didn't really want to say anything at all. I paid attention to what people were saying and heard every word. I am a motor-mouth by nature. But here I was, feeling at ease not speaking.

I kept up my habit of praying before coming to Luke House. I also prayed as I headed home, thanking God for the opportunity to be there that night. Before this, I'd been praying mostly for my own life, my friends and family, my own health issues. But now, I'd come to understand the power of praying for people I just met and even strangers I saw as I went about my day.

And most importantly, I prayed for the direction to better serve others. And this led me to start seeing the needs of others. I had found empathy.

After that, it seemed like Luke House spilled outside the walls of that building. As I went about my days, I saw folks I'd met at Luke House—as I walked my dog, when I went shopping, going to work on the bus. Luke House was no longer my once-a-month event—it was my opportunity to participate in the healing of my community, something that was ongoing and needed my prayers and support. It was God's love at work, and it was something I could be a part of and practice in all aspects of my life.

Jesus might feel right at home sharing a meal at Luke House

by Phil Haslanger

You never know just which way a conversation might turn around the dinner table at Luke House.

On this particular autumn evening, one of my dinner companions was recalling going down to the UW campus in the late 1960s as a teen, with protesting students and riot-gearred cops clashing on the streets as he watched and gulped down tear gas. He grew up in Madison, he said, and he and his dad sometimes would be part of the demonstrations. Other times, he would go down there with friends.

“Lots of riots in those days,” he recalled.

The man next to him gnawed off a piece of bread. “Gonna be riots again,” he mumbled, perhaps reflecting the 9+ percent unemployment rate, perhaps reflecting the general unease throughout the land as 2010 was nearing an end.

That was a conversation stopper, at least for a while.

When Jesus was sitting at tables with diners in his day, he heard their unease as well. A woman came in off the streets and washed his feet with her tears. Zacchaeus came down out of a tree to host Jesus at his home and promised to repay all those he had cheated and then give half of what he had left to the poor.

The zealots of Jesus’s day wanted to riot against the occupation of the Romans. Judas wanted to stop wasting money on symbolism and give it to the poor. Some of Jesus’ closest followers were ready to call down fire from heaven on those who disagreed with them.

So what did Jesus do?

He got a bowl of water and washed their feet. He broke some bread and shared it with them. He handed them a cup of wine to seal this new relationship he was offering them with God. He knew something about being an outcast, after all. He was born that way.



“Lots of riots in those days,” he recalled.

And he knew something about hospitality. Shepherds looked out for him, and strangers from a far away land brought him gifts.

He knew something about oppressive powers. Herod sent out troops to kill him even when he was a tiny baby. He jostled with Satan in the wilderness. And the Romans finally put him to death.

And then he broke bread again with folks on the road to Emmaus. He cooked fish on the seashore for his followers. He shared a meal and offered the abundance of life.

Much like what happens around the round tables at Luke House.

Phil Haslanger is the pastor of Memorial United Church of Christ, Fitchburg, Wisconsin.

LUKE HOUSE

COMMUNITY NEWS

Christmas, 2010

The Board of Directors of Luke House publishes COMMUNITY NEWS and runs Luke House, 310 S. Ingersoll St., Madison, WI 53703, dedicated to serving the needs of low-income and homeless people in Madison and to bringing people together in fellowship. The Board supervises the Community Meal Program, serving nine meals a week at Luke House.

We welcome your letters and comments. Write to get on our mailing list and let us know if you’re moving so the News can follow you.

Write us at LUKE HOUSE, 1046 Williamson St., Madison WI 53703 or call 608-256-MEAL.

Debbie found friendship and love along with her Thanksgiving feast

It was Thanksgiving Day. I was standing in line outside Luke House, bearing the freezing cold and the winds. But I was not alone.

My name is Debbie, and I'm from North Carolina. A few months ago, like many others, I found myself in the unemployment line, my job of 28 years having been eliminated. Fortunately, I was hired by FEMA and deployed to Wisconsin at the end of October to assist public agencies requesting disaster relief from the September floods.

Unable to go home, I knew I would be alone at Thanksgiving, so I started to search for places to go. The church bulletin had an item about Luke House. I called Paul Ashe, the director.

They already had all the help they needed for Thanksgiving Day, but he said I could help with the preparation of the meal on Wednesday. So I was there on Wednesday to peel potatoes. And WE DID WE PEEL POTATOES !!!! It seemed like a truckload! The time went by way too fast and, before I knew it, we were done. I didn't want to leave. I enjoyed the company so much, and I could feel the love in the air, the thankfulness of everyone around that they had an opportunity to give of themselves for others.

I've always been a worker and enjoyed the camaraderie in the kitchen for special events at my own church back home. But this was different. This wasn't a chore.

Before I left I got a chance to talk with Paul about Luke House. I learned that this is how Luke House operates, individuals joining others to provide meals for the needy people of Madison.

Paul did invite me for Thanksgiving Dinner at Luke House, and that's how I found myself in line in the freezing temperatures of Madison on Thanksgiving Day. My new friends in line were full of conversation. One young man was counting his days, 45, I think, before he headed to Florida. Another man sold everything he had so he could pay for his daughter's college education. He said he has no regrets. Talk amongst some of the guests was that the shelters were really getting full. I asked why people were coming here when

it was so cold outside. The answer: "Because Luke House feeds us."

The doors finally opened. We had braved the cold, and the wonderful smells of turkey and dressing told us that it was all worthwhile. We watched as the next table became available and the full plates of food were set on it. Then we were seated. The man next to me did a quick "Hail Mary" and a blessing. Most of us said "amen" and gave our own thanks. The room was filled with warmth. We ate, laughed, and became friends.

As our plates were emptying, and desserts were brought to our table, either apple or pumpkin pie. There are no words that can describe the love, the comfort, the compassion and even the importance that I felt.



No one asked why I was there. No one looked down on me. The servers thought I was as needy as the man sitting next to me. And I was. I was alone on Thanksgiving Day, and I needed fellowship.

As always, God delivered, and I received the wonderful gift of friendship and love at Luke House.

Share Christmas Eve and Christmas Day dinner with us. Call 256-MEAL for times.

Paul Ashe directs the Community Meal Program. The Board of Directors is comprised of Ken and Elrene Lund, Christine and Glen Reichelderter, M.J. Wiseman, and Donna Kirschmann. Write us at LUKE HOUSE, 1046 Williamson St., Madison WI 53703 or call 608-256-MEAL. Find The Community Meal Program on the Web: www.lukehousemadison.org.

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Some things-- like hunger-- never change

By Ruth Poochigian

Luke House and I go back a LONG way. I mean a REALLY long way!

Paul Ashe was just getting started in the venture that would ultimately lead to Luke House. I was a graduate student at UW. Back in those days the Meal Program was held in the basement of St. Paul's University Catholic Center. I was haunted by the sight of all those folks who lined up every day. Paul would say "come on in, sit down and enjoy a meal."

Over the years I've lived in different places, but as with many folks, I ended up back in Madison. I found that some things never change. Like hunger. And so the meals continue.

Now I welcome the chance to "come on in, sit down and enjoy a meal." Why? I've been a volunteer at Luke House with other members of my parish. We never know who will show up on the third Wednesday of the month. Sometimes they are families. Sometimes members of the parish youth group. Over time I got to know the names of the "regulars" (which includes members of another church down the road from us). I like seeing the regulars at church. We often resonate to the same things in the preaching. We pray together. We share greetings and can say, *genuinely*, "see you next time."

The menu for our night never changes. The regulars know the drill, and people pitch in as we learn the routine. We prepare the meal. We pray together – for our guests, for ourselves, for all who are hungry. Then it's time to serve.

We greet the guests and show them to round tables for eight. Often a volunteer or two join them at each table. All are served. Sometimes there is conversation. Often there are expressions of thanks as guests leave Luke House.

Then we clean the tables and re-set them for another group.

Some things never change.

Luke House community gives thanks, offers blessings of the season

It's not just the food

I'd like to express my thanks and appreciation to the fantastic people who make the Luke House what it is. Not just the great food but also the volunteers that I've talked to from all walks of life that make this place so great to come back to when you're a little down on your luck.

Roger

Luke House is a blessing from God.

Good people. Otto and I would like to thank you for your untiring dedication to help us and our neighbors. Merry Christmas and a loving, happy, full New Year.

Tracy

You are more than angels.

My family and I have been homeless, jobless, and very stressed out over the past several months. If it weren't for those associated with Luke House, we would starve and have no place to go. Thanks everyone for your time and effort. C.P.

My brother and I enjoy the good meals the devoted volunteers at Luke House serve. Luke House has a very pleasant atmosphere. Thanks for letting us come here. MKA & SPA

I want to thank all the people who cook and serve. I haven't had a job since March.

Diane

To the ones who care

Thanks for your considerable time and effort. We each do what we can to help one another. DPC I all of a sudden get low on money, and it's great to be able to get a good meal. The meals are different and prepared great. AKF

Thank you for the blessing of food and warmth and love.

I am 52 years old, was laid off in May of 2006, and have been searching for work ever since. My unemployment has run out. Without you, I would be starving. The way in which the program is run makes me feel like a human being. God bless you all for your kindness. GL

I've never had a meal here I didn't like. Micky

For the first time in 43 years I'm homeless: no relatives, few friends. I'm living in my truck. A good meal around Christmas time is much appreciated and is in the true Christmas spirit. I'm sure Jesus would appreciate the feeding of hungry people more than materialistic, temporary goods. JB

Thank you for never making me feel less than human. LG

A note from our director

I sit at a very interesting crossroads of life here at Luke House. Many different people come here-- the poorest of the poor, those whose faith commitment leads them to provide food, folks having their first meal here and experienced guests. All are welcome, and all contribute to a warm, welcoming community.

Luke House is important for more than food. It's a safe place for people who see themselves as being different to come together and find out they are not so different after all. People get to know each other here a little bit better even than some people who have gone to church together for years. Faith is lived here, and it's an honor for me to be in the middle of it.

About six months after a new greeter starts here, they invariably tell me that they're disturbed by the indignities people they meet here must endure: waiting in the doorway for time to pass, putting groceries back on the shelf when they discover they don't have enough money, walking for miles for want of bus fare. They've always been there, of course, but the greeter has awakened to them. Here we acknowledge all people in their poverty, in their presence, in their resources.

I am grateful to be here, more grateful than I can ever express. And I am grateful for your participation and presence here. God's blessing on you and yours and the best in 2011.

Paul Ashe

Bake a bigger Christmas

Every year about this time – true to dog-eared recipe cards – you may find yourself faithfully baking amaretti, baklava, barquillos, benne biscotti, kringle, krumkake, pizzelles, springerle, stollen or tuile. Or maybe you just prefer spritz or snickerdoodles.

Whatever your family's preferences, your Christmas cookies are very likely more than the sum of their ingredients. Their scents and textures are the stuff of holiday memories within the circle of those you love.

This year, as you bake for Christmas, consider expanding that circle to include those who look to The Community Meal Program for hospitality. Make your Christmastime baking rituals even richer by adding a bit to your batches of special goodies so you can share some with those who come to Luke House for holiday meals.

A dozen or two of your home-made cookies, bars or candies will help ensure that we can offer each person who joins us for a holiday meal a plate of Christmas treats to take along. You'll know you're helping to make somebody's holiday more festive. Perhaps your own special family recipe will even evoke someone else's memories of happy Christmas celebrations long ago.

Please bring your cookies and other confections to Luke House during the week before Christmas. We'll be serving lunch and dinner on Christmas Eve day and Christmas, so you may also bring your treats on either of those days. Or call 256-MEAL to arrange another time. Please use a paper plate or container that won't need to be returned.

Please contribute if you can

As I write this, the line of people waiting for our evening meal at Luke House stretches past the windows that look out onto Ingersoll Street from our dining room. It was much the same at lunch today. Many faces are familiar. Several are new to me, as is the case at any of the nine meals we serve each week.

The faces span spectrums of age and background. A young mother calms her toddler as they wait. An older gentleman adjusts the backpack that holds his possessions. Some who join them this evening are unemployed. Others work in low-wage jobs. Several, I'm sure, are lonely.

All are experiencing need that draws them to the nourishment and sense of connection The Community Meal Program offers.

Each month, hundreds of families and individuals – acting as part of a faith community – provide most of the food we offer at Luke House. That's the model of The Community Meal Program; it works for the people fed by the 4,000 meals we serve for lunch or dinner each month.

Although volunteer groups supply food, other costs of the largest meal program in Dane County amount to about \$70,000 per year. To meet this expense, we rely entirely on private donations from generous individuals, families, churches and other organizations.

Even if the recession has technically ended, you and I know times are still tight – especially so for the most vulnerable members of our community. If you've helped The Community Meal Program financially before, thank you. I know not all who have supported us in the past are able to help us in these tougher times.

If you're blessed with enough to meet your needs and those of your loved ones, I hope you'll consider providing a gift to support the ministry of hospitality that is The Community Meal Program.

The Community Meal Program – operated by Luke House Inc., a 501(c)(3) charitable organization – receives no government funding. Whatever you can afford to give will help – and will express your solidarity with the hospitality we offer. You can use the envelope that came with this newsletter or give online at www.lukehousemadison.org (click on the “providing support tab”). Your tax-deductible gift will provide some of the help we need to serve the increasing numbers of local people who look to The Community Meal Program for a nutritious meal in an atmosphere of dignity.

I thank you for considering making a year-end gift to help the people who rely on the food and community they find at Luke House. I wish you and your family a blessed Christmas season!
Sincerely,

Paul Ashe

Director, The Community Meal Program

Find The Community Meal Program on the Web:

www.lukehousemadison.org