

PARTNERS

A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada



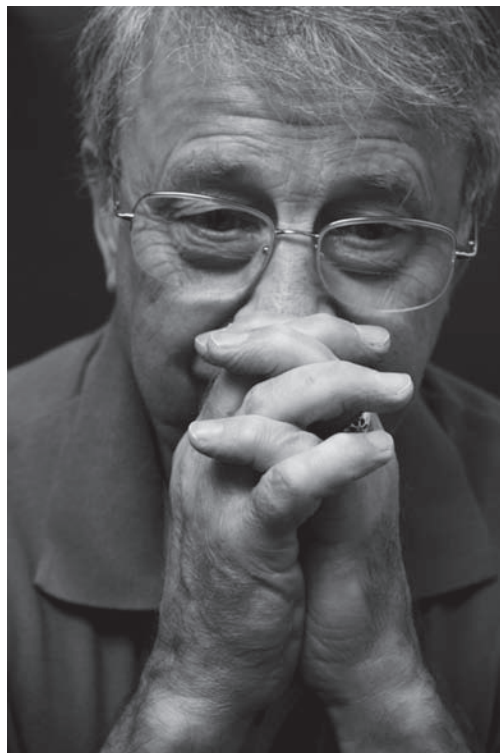
Give us today our daily bread

By Pam DeWilde

Someone asked me recently which of the five senses I would miss the most if one of them were taken away: sight, sound, touch, smell or taste? What would it be like to lose my sense of taste? I love food! When I imagine all the nations gathered together, as described in Revelations (7:9), I envision an amazing meal as part of this immense, eternal celebration.

Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” It suggests a request for food “enough for today.” While God is a generous Father who supplies us with an abundance of blessings, this phrase also speaks to the fact that He cares tenderly for our day-to-day needs, and urges us to rely on him. Living amid so much abundance, it is hard for us to fathom what “enough for today” would look like or even feel like. A friend recently recounted a scene from a trip she made to Zambia. “When we visited the AIDS patients in Zambia, one young woman was feeding her son *shema* (cornmeal and water) and a can of beans. He was eating as if each mouthful was precious, carefully picking up each bean with a forefinger and thumb as she rolled the *shema* into little balls for him.”

If you’ve ever been truly ravenous you know that it is not a cruise ship-style buffet that satisfies. It is something that is “enough for today” that eases the pains of hunger. We all know people through work, school,



and/or in our neighbourhoods, who are literally starving for meaning and a sense of worth for their lives. They hunger and thirst for a Saviour who can revive them with hope and grace. Community ministry is one of the ways our churches try to reach out to those who do not yet know God. We sometimes stumble when we try to get “outreach” activities off the ground because they are weighed down by extravagant expectations. We assume we need to offer the bountiful buffet, when we really need to offer less *stuff* and more of ourselves and our own story of how Jesus satisfies.

Operation Manna is a program of Diaconal Ministries Canada that en-

courages and equips churches across Canada to be involved in community ministry. For example, Operation Manna has been involved with several churches starting community kitchens. People come together on a regular basis to share the cost and effort of preparing several different meals that they can take home for themselves and their families. One participant shared that attending the monthly community kitchen in her neighbourhood was her only social contact with other people. This small group was “enough for today” to support her as she slowly recovered from the isolating effects of a mental illness.

The Lockside Cove Café (see over), one of Operation Manna’s newest partners, seeks to nourish hungry visitors with good food, and begin to feed their spiritual hunger also. The church’s investment reflects what author Christine Pohl refers to as God’s “remarkable economy.” “[A]s we make room for hospitality, more room becomes available to us for life, hope, and grace” (*Making Room*, preface, page xiii).

Through our involvement in community ministry we can testify to how God answers our prayers for “daily bread”; and, as we offer ourselves, God blesses and enlarges what we give, so that together we experience a taste of that amazing, spectacular, banquet yet to come.



Pam DeWilde is Community Ministry Developer with Diaconal Ministries Canada.

TAKE NOTE

1. Look for the Operation Manna Offering materials and resources that will be arriving at your church in early April.

2. Read more about how we can make room for people in our lives and in our churches: *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* by Christine D. Pohl. Eerdmans, 1999.

3. A mini-workshop accompanies this issue of *Partners* online, providing a venue for further exploration on this topic personally and with other deacons. www.diaconalministries.com

Possibilities and potential for a new café

When a church considers the expansion of its ministry, it often looks at plans to provide a bigger parking lot. Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario, originally looked at the restaurant building next door as potential space for a parking lot, but then the church heard God calling them to another — much tastier — vision.

The church is developing a restaurant ministry to be served at the recently named Lockside Cove Café. Why a restaurant? A church member explains, "... we need to be salt and light in a different manner for some people in our community who are "hungry" for the gospel, yet will not go inside a church for whatever reason." The Café intends to "... make good food to be a witness. The barley loaves and fish that Jesus blessed, or the water which He miraculously turned into wine, were all good; therefore, so too does our food offerings need to be good, to ensure people will come again. By feeding the body, hopefully, we will eventually feed the soul."

Tammy Vahrmeier, Coordinator of the Lockside Cove Café, is eager for the doors to open, and to invite people into a comfortable setting where relationships can be built. The building has already undergone significant

renovations, and more work is required to bring the kitchen facilities up to municipal codes. The Café hopes to welcome its first customers this spring.

Operation Manna is partnering with Covenant CRC to provide funding and the resources needed to build an effective, sustainable community ministry.

Even before the doors to the café are open to customers, the vision of this ministry—to be a place of belonging in the community, a model of genuine hospitality, and a voice of hope—is being pulled and stretched to include even more possibilities. The school across the street is interested in the possibility of developing a breakfast program. There have been conversations with the local seafarers' ministry. A gentleman passing by the building during the renovations shared that he used to frequent the former restaurant. He is now part of a recovery group that is looking for a new, safe meeting space (a cove).

The church is discovering that when you step out faithfully into the community to serve, God is already there and ready to involve you in building a bigger, lovelier, even tastier, place to belong.



The Lockside Cove Café in St. Catharines, Ontario.



A family meal

Sara's Place is a home for young, single moms providing life-giving hospitality. For many of the girls staying at the home for a few months before and after the birth of their children, it is the only experience of a stable, loving family environment they have ever experienced.

As the term "house parents" suggests, this ministry models the kind of nurturing and support that the young women leaving the home will be able to show to their children. After her first day at Sara's Place, one young woman shared that it was the first time she had ever experienced a "family" meal. She was 27 years old.

Operation Manna opens the door for community ministry

Operation Manna is partnering with Sara's Place to provide the organizational and financial support it needs to get started. It is one of 22 ministries across Canada where Operation Manna opens the door for local Christian Reformed churches to become involved in community ministries in their neighbourhood.

By holding an offering in your church on Operation Manna Sunday (May 4, 2008) or sometime throughout the year, you are contributing to the growth of community ministries that welcome the lost and lonely to a place of care and belonging. Promotional and resource materials will arrive at your church by early April.

www.DiaconalMinistries.com