

Upper Elementary Service Experience at Rose Garden Mission

Wednesday, June 3, 2009

By Dan Teller

Wednesday is pizza day at the Rose Garden Mission. I accompanied a group of 11 upper elementary students on a service outing to the Mission, with a camera to capture our experience. Upon arrival, I found the camera 'sans battery,' so words will have to be my vehicle.

Rose Garden is in a former pizza carry-out storefront in a run-down section of Covington, Kentucky. Four sisters from the Franciscan Daughters of Mary provide this mission as their ministry to the poor. The Mission distributes food, baby clothes and supplies, and provides pregnancy testing and pro-life counseling.

We arrived at 10:00 a.m., greeted by Sr. Mary Joseph. Sister is in her 60's, in full brown Franciscan habit, a bit hunched in her gait but full of life and sparkle in her demeanor. She greeted us at the counter and instructed the children that when the people begin arriving at 11:00 for food, the first thing the counter worker must do is offer a friendly, caring greeting, and then be sure to wish the person a good day as her or leaves.

We set out ramps for carting in the boxes of frozen pizza, expected to arrive at any moment. Then, Sister immediately put the children to work, clearing shelves of bread, emptying freezers of English muffins, and making floor space in the 20' x 30' serving room for the 50+ cases of pizza expected momentarily.

By 10:40, neighborhood people began lining up at the serving window. We were busy sweeping and vacuuming the front room and opening grocery bags to receive food. But the pizza, though expected an hour ago, had not arrived. By 10:45, 30 people were waiting in line. All we had to distribute was bread.

We had called St. Vincent de Paul, who brings it in by truck, but they did not answer. So Sister said, "Let's pray." She gathered a group of five or six children next to one of the freezer chests in the back room, and spent a minute or two in prayer, thanking God for providing for His people according to His will, and asking Him to send food to feed His children. We concluded with the sign of the cross, we looked up, and at that instant, in the door walks a young woman carrying a case of apples. She is followed by others with more apples, and boxes of grated cabbage and lettuce. A few bags of potatoes, and then others arrive with several dozen jugs of milk.

This really struck the children. By 11:00, Sister had instructed several children how to greet the people, find out their needs, and distribute the food. Still no pizza, though. A group of 4 or 5 of our boys decided to make a little huddle. They made the sign of the cross with intent to offer further prayers, but were unsure what to say and dispersed. But they had gathered together in the Lord's name!

Then the pizza truck came, and everyone sprang into high gear. Now there are 50 or so people curled in line, waiting in the front room to be served. Many of our own students, joined by 5 or 6 homeschooling children are weaving through the line carrying pizza cases from the truck to the back room. A small cluster of children and adults fills orders at the serving window. There are 11 QAMS children, myself, two homeschooling moms, 5-8 other homeschoolers, all in flurry of activity, with sweet Sr. Mary Joseph calmly and clearly and lovingly providing direction to all. Children are carrying in pizza cases, stacking them five high. Others are packaging the pizza in bags. Others are fetching baby items from the storeroom. Others fill food orders and hand them to those in line.

Then more bread trays arrive, from the same truck. Trays and trays of bread products – dozens of trays. Sr. Mary Joseph marvels, “Our basket runneth over! Give everyone three loaves!” All of this is in this tiny 20’ x 30’ back room of the old pizza carry-out. Amidst the shelves, desks, three freezer chests, and cupboards, probably 20 people are maneuvering amidst two towers of bread trays, 10 stacks of five-high pizza cases, bagging, delivering, working together for others.

We left at 11:45 as the line calmed down a bit. The time had flown by, as we were engrossed in our work and activity. The children sang loudly all the way home.