

By giving food to neighbors, IND roots holiday - and students - in giving



Three days before Thanksgiving, students from the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore deliver 55 meals to those in need. (Maria Wiering | CR Staff)

By Maria Wiering

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Teenagers in blue jackets and plaid skirts stepped out the front doors of the Institute of Notre Dame Nov. 24 hoisting boxes brimming with food and lugging wrapped turkeys. They crossed Aisquith Street and entered the courtyard of Latrobe Homes, public housing in East Baltimore.

Three days before Thanksgiving, the students delivered food for holiday meals to their neighbors, a tradition more than 50 years old.

Most were members of Hildie's Helpers, a service club led by School Sister of Notre Dame Sister Hilda Marie "Hildie" Sutherland, a longtime fixture at the all-girls high school. Students lined IND's halls with decorated boxes in early October and gradually filled them with nonperishable food to prepare for the event.



Sister Hildie (Courtesy IND)

This year, the girls distributed 55 meals, but have given as many as 200, Sister Hildie said. Extra food goes to Baltimore-area charities.

Senior and Hildie's Helpers president Kayla Pahl, 17, helped to coordinate the event, which took place after the school's dismissal. It was the fourth year she'd participated in the group and its Thanksgiving outreach.

"I love service, and it's one of my favorite things to do," said Pahl, a parishioner of St. Ursula, Parkville, and graduate of its grade school. "(Sister) Hildie, (with) the spirit she has and how much she wants to give, has really encouraged me to help her do what she has set her life to do."



About 150 girls - 40 percent of IND's student body - are members of Hildie's Helpers. (Courtesy IND)

Gloria Horton, 60, has received the makings of a Thanksgiving feast from IND students each year since moving to Latrobe Homes two decades ago. This year she plans to host her 89-year-old mother, son, and seven grandchildren for the holiday.

"It means a lot," she said of the food, adding that she always sends a thank-you note and watches out for IND's students in the inner-city neighborhood.

The school's Thanksgiving tradition traces its roots to 1949, when Sister Hildie was 17. She was designated the community's "out sister," tasked with running errands and caring for the poor who lived near the school and motherhouse, which her order established there in 1847.

The motherhouse moved to North Charles Street in the 1950s, but Sister Hildie stayed at IND and engaged its students in her charitable works. The Thanksgiving outreach began in 1959. About 150 girls - 40 percent of IND's student body - are members of Hildie's Helpers.

Now 82, Sister Hildie said her group's outreaches - which include Christmas and Easter gifts - teach charity. As for Sister Hildie, "It makes me relax, rejoice and thank God that we helped somebody else put food on the table," she said.

Like Pahl, Daeja Hodge, 17, has been part of Hildie's Helpers since her freshman year and enjoys serving others.

"I always like to see their faces," she said of the school's neighbors.

This year was the first time Hodge's classmate, Dayshia Kerney, participated in the Thanksgiving outreach, although she regularly volunteers at soup kitchens on the holiday itself, she said. A graduate of St. Mark School in Catonsville, Kerney appreciates IND's outward focus, she said.

"It's about teaching you to be more compassionate and generous to others around you and how to be a passionate person," she said. "Instead of just focusing on yourself, you also have to focus on the community."

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