

Empty Bowls, full hearts

Back in January (which seems like forever ago!), St. Joan of Arc School celebrated Catholic Schools week with a “buddy day,” during which older students paired with younger students to paint ceramic bowls for St. Vincent de Paul’s Empty Bowls fundraiser.



According to their website, “Empty Bowls is St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore’s signature event that raises funds, friends and awareness of our work to serve those who are hungry and homeless in our community.” At the event, guests are treated to a variety of (unlimited!) soups prepared by some of Baltimore’s finest restaurants, silent auctions, door prizes, and kids’ activities.



And the best part - you can choose one of over 3,500 (!) handmade bowls to take home.



And so, being the art teacher and a parent volunteer, I found myself surrounded by all of my students at once in the parish hall on that blustery January afternoon, coaching them as they decorated their “blank canvasses” with stars, spirals, swirls, stripes, and...Spiderman (!).



A wonderful lady named Kathy Fick of [Kathy Fick Designs](#) offered her artistic eye and ceramic expertise.



It was fun to work with Collin and his 6th grade buddy, whose name is also Colin.

Both of them love art, so they had a great time collaborating on their bowl.



After an hour that felt more like five minutes, it was time for everyone to clean up and pack up their bowls to be fired in a kiln (it's like a super-hot furnace where the glaze on pottery turns into a glassy finish.)

A few weeks later, Kathy sent our marketing director, Margie Forbes, a picture of our fired bowls. It reminded me of the upcoming event, so I called my beloved Aunt Anne, who attended last year, and she organized a table for us to attend. I was excited to be a part of such a wonderful cause and couldn't wait to see my students' bowls in person!

When the big day, March 28th, finally arrived, my parents and I piled into my mom's car and headed to Timonium Fairgrounds to experience firsthand the Empty Bowls experience. We arrived 5 minutes early, and there were already hundreds of people in line, waiting to enjoy this special event.



As soon as the doors opened, I rushed to the table where all the bowls were lined up on display, glancing at the picture of Collin and Colin holding up their bowl on my phone. I really wanted to find it and bring it back home with me. "We have more underneath," a man told me. I looked and looked and looked some more, but I never found it.



I was slightly disappointed because I wanted a keepsake of that fun day we spent brightening up our winter with colorful glaze. I guess in a way, I wanted to hold on to a tangible piece of Collin, but his art has found a new home in someone's sunny Baltimore kitchen. (I'll face this again on a larger scale someday, when Collin grows up, but art and children are meant to be cultivated and shared with the world.) I imagine the new owner of the bowl said, "Collin and Colin...That's funny!"

I did, however, discover several bowls that my students created. I even helped with

one of them. So I chose two, and purchased a third for my principal.

Even though the ceramic bowls we selected were empty, the insulated paper mugs everyone was carrying around were full of hot delicious soups in a slew of flavors. My cousin Kathy was a big fan of the Maryland crab soup from Bill's Seafood. My mom couldn't stop raving about the coconut curry from KidzTable. And I was head over heels for Gertrude's Portuguese kale soup. (I had 3 bowls!) Served with a side of H&S Baker's sesame seed speckled Italian bread, it was the perfect complement to a somewhat snowy late March day.

The cold outside was a harsh reminder that while we were enjoying a modest gala inside of a massive exhibition hall, complete with enormous blue and yellow balloons and lanterns, there were people just a few miles away who were starving. Statistics about hunger were printed on little papers and stuffed into the ceramic bowls and posted on signs throughout the hall. The facts about the children hit me hardest.

I've witnessed childhood hunger firsthand as a teacher in low-income schools. I've seen the impact that starvation has on the body, on the mind, on the soul. It's a condition that we must fight with whatever resources we can find. This event alone wasn't going to solve world hunger, or even Baltimore hunger, but it does bring to light the grim picture of families without food. But St. Vincent de Paul's serves over 30,000 people, and the proceeds from Empty Bowls would feed many of them.

True to their mission, the St. Vincent de Paul volunteers were the most gracious hosts. I had a nice conversation with a college student about our vegan diets. I met two quiet, gentle ladies who run a summer camp for underprivileged kids and offered to ask some Harford County farmers to donate food and milk to their program.



A grandmother with the spirit of a teenager hugged the air out of me when I told her I was the art teacher at St. Joan of Arc and that my spectacular students had created 100 beautiful bowls. "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" she said. Her smile and her energy were contagious.

"We'll be back next year!" I told her.

"You better!" she said.