

# **‘All God’s people’: Beans and Bread helps feed East Baltimore’s hungry**



On a busy day, Beans and Bread, a Fells Point soup kitchen in operation since 1977, serves lunch for 300 at the corner of Bank and Bond streets.

“It depends on what we’re serving,” said Beverly Alston, assistant director of the facility, which is operated by St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting those in need. “Word gets out.”

Baked chicken with rice and greens is the most popular, Alston said, but meatballs and mashed potatoes also drew a steady stream of guests on a recent Thursday, though the nondescript building in a quiet, residential neighborhood gave few hints toward the activity within.

Feeding the hungry is work, but the approximately 14 volunteers (12 for lunch, two for breakfast) who keep Beans and Bread running into its fifth decade of service don’t see it that way.

“I like serving,” said longtime volunteer Ann Amrhein, a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and resident of Perry Hall. “They’re all God’s people.”

Volunteering longer than she can remember, Amrhein has gotten to know some of the guests.

"Some of them know me by name, and they come to say hello," she said. "If you have a minute, you can stop and talk – breakfast is good for that."

Larry Dabrowski, a retired public school teacher and parishioner of St. Rose of Lima in Brooklyn, said that serving guests, who sit at tables and dine together in a restaurant-like atmosphere, helps him live "the works of mercy."

"I felt it's a way to give back to the community, because I have a pension from being a teacher, and I've had a good life," Dabrowski continued. "Once I came here, I just felt drawn to come back. There's a lot of camaraderie with the other volunteers who take time out of their day to help the poor."

The story goes that the organization's founder, Benet Hanlon, a Benedictine priest and theater enthusiast who would later leave the priesthood, asked a hungry man what he would like to eat.

"Beans and bread," was in the reply.

Beans and Bread has been under the operation of St. Vincent de Paul since 1986, and at the Bond Street location since 1992.

In addition to serving lunch Monday through Saturday and breakfast Sunday through Friday, the facility serves as a day shelter, open 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., when guests may take showers, launder their clothing, secure their personal identification and use a telephone or computer.

They may also designate Beans and Bread as a mailing address, a necessity when applying for jobs or certain benefits; case management services assist guests in securing the latter.

The facility is also home to two of St. Vincent de Paul's housing programs. Home Connections, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, houses 60 "chronically homeless" men and women, according to Dorothy Askew-Sawyer, senior director at Beans and Bread.

"We actually work with the landlords in the community," Askew-Sawyer said. "They help us with housing the individuals."

Furthermore, the Frederick Ozanam House - four apartments, four bedrooms each, located at the Beans and Bread building - will soon house larger families encountering homelessness.