

Mount St. Mary's students participate in Hunger Dinner

EMMITSBURG - A three-course salmon dinner, an everyday family-style meal or a cup of rice and beans - those were the meals provided to nearly 30 students at the third-annual Hunger Dinner Nov. 14 at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg.

Upon arrival, students blindly picked a dollar amount from a paper bag. Those with \$10 were seated in the upper-class section, with formal place settings and dining staff; those with \$5 were seated at a ten-person table with platters of home-style dishes; those with \$1 were directed to a section of the room with no tables or chairs, and only a pot of rice and beans with a stack of paper cups and plastic spoons.

The dinner is part of the university's Hunger and Homelessness Week, which features events including a speaker from the National Coalition for the Homeless; a Walk to End Hunger to raise awareness and funds for the Frederick County Rescue Mission; a service trip to Baltimore's Our Daily Bread Employment Center to volunteer for the Our Daily Bread Hot Meal program; and the SNAP Challenge, a four-day experience where participants eat only what they can buy for \$4.44 per day, simulating the experience of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Ian Van Anden, director of the Office of Social Justice at Mount St. Mary's, said experiences such as the Hunger Dinner help students to understand solidarity and what it means to break the "us vs. them" mentality.

"That is what the Hunger Banquet is all about," Van Anden said to students in the event's introduction. "Each of you thinking about your responsibility to these unjust and broken systems that result in certain people that have, and certain people that don't."

The Office of Social Justice often sponsors events which include a model, a reflection and a call to action. The model serves to immerse students and create understanding that might otherwise not be achieved.

Arianarose Aragón, junior communications major and student lead for Hunger and Homelessness Week, participated in a similar event in high school, but on a much larger scale. She prefers leading the college version, as it is less hectic and the discussion is rich.

“The experience is always different, which replicates our world very well because people handle situations in different ways,” Aragón said.

Kayla Hughes, a junior double majoring in psychology and criminal justice, said the difference between a simulation and real life is that she is going to have another meal when others might not.

After eating, students engaged in discussion with their class groups and as a large group. Many of the topics covered are those outlined by Catholic social teaching: rights and responsibilities, solidarity and life and dignity of the human person.

“It’s one thing to hear about it,” said Amara Jerome, a freshman criminal justice and sociology major who sat at the upper-class table. “But it’s different to actually see it.”

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