

Our Daily Bread asks parishioners to perform small miracle

By Erik Zygmunt

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The Our Daily Bread Employment Center is making a request of parishioners across the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and it's not multiplying loaves and fishes:

Could you consider baking a casserole once in a while?

Since 1981, Our Daily Bread, a program of Catholic Charities of Baltimore, has been providing a hot lunch to those who need it. Since the center started serving nearly 35 years ago, it has never missed a day, including weekends, holidays, blizzards, heat waves and hurricanes. On the slowest of days, about 250 people line up for lunch at 725 Fallsway. On a normal day, it's 750. Last fiscal year, the center served 262,566 meals.

"It takes about 90 casseroles a day to do it," said Kim Kahl, volunteer manager at Our Daily Bread, adding that the casseroles are the key "hot part" of the meal.

According to Kahl, casserole donations have dropped off some in recent years.

"A lot of our casserole makers are older people who have always done it," she said. "We're trying to get new people to join existing groups or start new groups."

Participating parishes have core groups of people that provide the casseroles. Our Daily Bread provides the pans and 10 recipes - chili, Texas hash, beef stew and chicken and broccoli, for example.

"We ask people to stick to the recipes," Kahl said. "If you serve something to one person and something else to another, that makes for a problem."

Parishioners make the casseroles in the provided pans, freeze them, and bring them to their parishes, where they are picked up and brought to Our Daily Bread.

"We try to make it as easy as possible," Kahl said. "Most people make one a month." When Our Daily Bread is short on casseroles, staff must make them.

"In our pantry we have beans; we have franks," Kahl said. "With whatever we can find, we make do, but that means money - it's a lot that has to come out of our budget."

"We're targeting the younger folks in the parishes," she added. "The older folks have done their turn."

St. Gabriel in Woodlawn is one of the old reliables.

"We probably send a dozen to 40 casseroles a month," said Don Monahan, who helps with the casserole effort at St. Gabriel. "Twenty-eight is a good average."

Additionally, the parish collects bread and pastry donations from local supermarkets and forwards any that can't be used locally to Our Daily Bread.

"That's been a help, too, I think," said Monahan.

To parishes like St. Gabriel, Kahl has a message.

"Thank you," she said. "The casseroles are such a blessing to us and to the people standing in line."

For more information on donating casseroles to Our Daily Bread, contact Kahl at 443-986-9031 or kkahl@cc-md.org, or contact your parish's casserole coordinator.

Also see:

New community center enriches Woodlawn parish

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society honors teen fundraisers