



BECAUSE *we are* CATHOLIC

Compassion drives Howard County parish's efforts to serve those in need in Baltimore City

It started with one man handing out hot dogs to people experiencing homelessness in downtown Baltimore. Less than two and a half years later, Our Lady of Perpetual Help's (OLPH) "All Weather Compassion" has taken Steve Sarnecki's call to action and turned it into one of the top priorities in the Ellicott City parish's ministry program.

"We serve between 400-600 people every weekend," said Lisa Sliker, OLPH's administrator. "It started in the fall of 2015 when Steve approached us with this idea he called 'Drive by Dogs'. He had been driving through the city, handing out hot dogs wrapped in tin foil as a way of meeting homeless people. He came with such joy and drew us into wanting to be part of it. Because of him, we have had the courage to go into places we would not necessarily have gone."

Originally the plan was to provide cold weather compassion near Our Daily Bread on Fallsway but the parish volunteers formed friendships with those they served and decided to increase efforts.

"Initially the concept was to bring coffee and a pastry through the winter and put ourselves in the middle of the situation," added Sliker. "But the energy of our parish just grew. We started checking with Dunkin Donuts and Panera Bread to see if we could get their leftover food to offer that to those in need. Our parish cooking crew started making homemade casseroles so every weekend there was some form of homemade food."

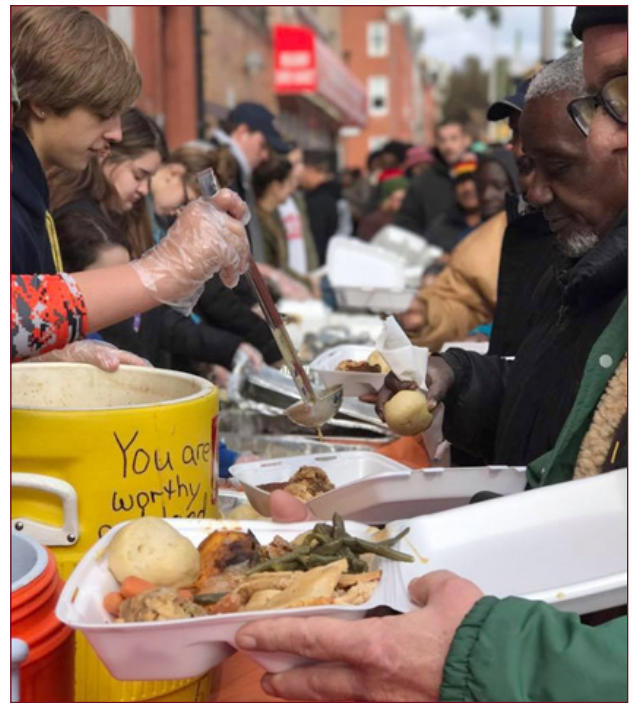
The following fall, OLPH's Salt of the Earth (SALT) team added a second location, on Broadway between Pratt and Lombard near the Powell Recovery Center, where it serves every Saturday and Sunday morning.

"That first day, we opened the trunk of my car and started serving pastries that my daughter spent the week making," Sliker said. "The school wanted to get involved, so parents were asked to consider making an extra bagged lunch every Friday for our friends in the city."

Hundreds of people suffering homelessness and addiction, as well as recovering individuals have come to depend on OLPH every week. SALT not only provides warm meals, it also administers emotional and spiritual support.

"We not only bring food and supplies, we engage. We want to get to know them, hear their stories, and develop relationships. We pray as a team before we go downtown. Once we get to the city we used to lead prayer but now our friends lead. I have heard some of the most gracious prayers of gratitude," she explained.

"We are there to serve, but we really want to solve. But our hands can only go so far," Sliker said. "There have been success stories like Bill, who went from being homeless to a greeter at the National Aquarium. But it can also be very heartbreaking at times when we learn someone has been killed or overdosed. We have become so close to so many. The biggest barrier from moving out of addiction or homelessness is



The Our Lady of Perpetual help SALT ministry team serves 400-600 homeless in Baltimore City each weekend.

stable housing."

In addition, OLPH also delivers food to St. Vincent de Paul's parish every Friday night, created a "Boxes for Baltimore" initiative that delivered 750 Christmas presents last month, and recently donated 200 warm coats to city residents in need.

"We have never missed a weekend," Sliker said. "Come rain or snow or wind chill advisory, we are downtown."

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN MARYLAND SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC.