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Detroit parish's free Sunday meal helps draw



neighborhood back to Mass

by [Daniel Meloy](#) • July 24, 2015

Parishioners and neighbors of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Detroit enjoy a free Sunday meal July 12, part of a joint service and evangelization outreach at the parish.

DETROIT — When St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Detroit saw a community need, it didn't wait for someone else to step up. After all, that's what faith does.

For the past six years, the parish has served a free Sunday meal out of its basement, with any and all invited to attend. The event started as a way for St. Charles to reach out to the community's poor and senior citizens, but it's quickly become a way to build the parish, too, because those who come for the meals are staying for the message.

"We've been doing this for almost five years now, because nobody else has a food program on Sunday," said Mary Ann Andrecovich, a member of the St. Charles Borromeo parish council and hospitality committee, which organizes the meals almost every Sunday after the 11:30 a.m. Mass.

The meals started after Bro. Ray Stadmeyer, OFM Cap., challenged parishioners to come up with a way for St. Charles to embrace its inner-city roots.

Each week, a different family, community organization or team provides the food and money necessary for a meal, which draws on average 200 visitors to the church, at 1491 Baldwin St.

"St. Charles' mission is to evangelize, to bring people in," Andrecovich said. "People come for the food and are now staying for our message. St. Charles is a part of the neighborhood. We have people who are realizing Catholics aren't people to be afraid of. We are about social justice and hospitality."

Social justice and embracing community action are key attributes of St. Charles Borromeo Parish, and in his July 12 homily, Bro. Stadmeyer discussed letting go of personal burdens and embracing the community God has given.

"It's important for St. Charles to have meals like this because it's a mix of reaching out to the neighborhood and doing missionary work," said Bro. Stadmeyer, the east-side parish's pastor. "We wanted to have a meal where we eat together, and we share in one another's company."

"Even though we don't require it, we have more people coming to Mass now," he added. "It's important we embrace the surrounding community. This is where we live; this is where our faith is."

The meals can be anything from hot dogs and burgers to chicken and turkey for special occasions. Individual families and groups are encouraged to call the rectory at (313) 331-0253 to sign up and sponsor a Sunday meal.

The parish is hoping to install an elevator to help people move from Mass to the meals in the basement of the church. To date, the group has raised \$1,000, but estimate it needs at least \$70,000 to install an elevator.

Andrecovich says a new elevator will help the parish better accommodate people of limited mobility and better serve St. Charles' mission to evangelize.

"More and more people are coming to our dinners," Andrecovich said. "People at first used to sit in the back pews, but now they have become part of the celebration. This is all part of being an evangelizing parish."

Priscilla Steenburg, director of religious education at St. Charles Borromeo, said the meal program has its roots in Bro. Stadmeyer's work with the Capuchin Soup Kitchen.

"This is free to whoever comes in," Steenburg said. "This community is extremely into social justice. We have an outreach program with the surrounding homes, and we invite mission trips to come to St. Charles and help out the community. We really want to embrace the community here and be a true neighborhood parish. Our message is to be a part of the area we are in."

The free Sunday meals serve a two-fold purpose, Andrecovich said: invite the neighborhood — both Catholics and non-Catholics — to experience St. Charles' message, and for parishioners to step outside their church walls and answer the call to evangelize.

"At our core, we are called to be a part of the community," Andrecovich said. "Some people are here because they need a meal, and we provide that to them. We are called to serve; we are called to be a part of this neighborhood. That's what makes St. Charles such a special place; we really want to embrace the community and make it part of our identity."