



## Food Ministries with St. Paul's Episcopal Church

By

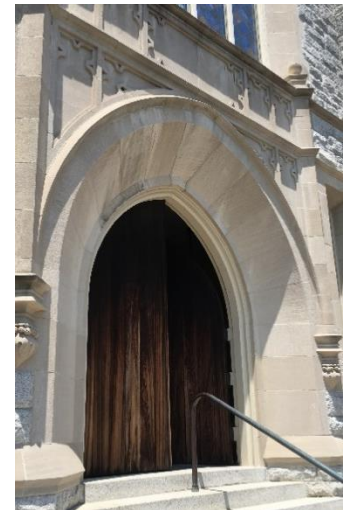
Cathy Frey



*St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Parish House on 35<sup>th</sup> Street*

St. Andrew's has always been a Parish aware of Jesus's message to help the less fortunate. Outreach ministries were formed in the early days after the church was founded. In 1919, one half of our offerings went to Outreach or Missions.

During the late 1980s, St. Andrew's started a canned good ministry to supplement the canned food which was distributed on Monday mornings at St. Paul's in downtown Newport News. Those who lived on the margins of society knew they could come to St. Paul's for help with food. Our Day School had "Thankful Thursdays", in which the students brought in food to add to what was already being collected by our parishioners. Although St. Vincent DePaul Catholic Church (located one block from St. Paul's) has a soup



*Saint Paul's Front Entrance*

kitchen, which feeds those in need Monday through Friday, there was nothing on the weekends. It was during this time that my husband, Craig Frey, began to help deliver the canned food to St. Paul's on Sunday afternoons. He and their rector, the Rev. Randolph Charles, became good friends. They often talked about a dream to feed the people more than just canned foods, or a handout at the door on Monday mornings. Especially important was the need to provide food on weekends. Craig began a discussion with our rector at that time, the Rev. Doug Burgoyne, about the possibility of preparing sandwiches to hand out to those who needed a meal. Mr. Burgoyne was very supportive of the ministry. He had one stipulation—that the food be prepared in our kitchen at St. Andrews and transported to St. Paul's for distribution.



*Parishioners preparing bag lunches at St. Paul's L-R unknown, Cathy Frey, BoBo Smith*

He wanted the people at St. Andrews to see what was happening and to come face to face, when possible, with the less fortunate. He wanted members of St. Andrews to see how they could help. And so the ministry began. We made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We also had fruit, a cookie, chips, and a napkin. All in a white paper bag, which we bought at wholesale cost from Riverside Paper goods. Many people helped. Francis Riley always got the paper goods for us. Ersel Kirsner and her husband Beryl, helped. We were able to get most of the food from the Peninsula

Food Bank at a per pound price. I began picking the food up, along with others, and delivering it to our kitchen for preparation on Saturday mornings. We formed teams and took turns making sandwiches weekly. Then the sandwiches were transported to St. Paul's for distribution.

About three months after initiating the ministry, we realized that the extra step of making food at St. Andrews was doing double work. So, with Mr. Burgoyne's blessing, we began doing the whole preparation at St. Paul's. We made 100 lunches each week. We gave out half of them on Saturday, and members of St. Paul's distributed the remaining ones on Sunday after their 10:30 service.

We continued to do this for several years. But Randolph and Craig had a dream. They felt strongly that those receiving the meals should be brought inside and eat, to treat them as Jesus would have treated them-- as if they were our own—because they are! But there was a roadblock. The idea of bringing those in need inside could be a safety problem. Some members were hesitant that there might be one who tried to stay in the Parish house after the meal was over. Suppose they hid and did damage to the building? Or threatened a parishioner or another person in need? After much discussion and lots of prayer, we decided that the time was right to break down the barrier. We should welcome those in need to come into the building to eat. To sit with us, as family does when having a meal. After all, isn't that what Jesus would have done? It was the beginning of a feeding program that survived for about 25+ years. The Bag Lunch Ministry, as it was first called, won an award presented by the Peninsula Food Bank in 1992 for the Most Innovative New Food Ministry on the Peninsula. We were humbled by this honor, seeing it only as a nod to us for doing what many other churches had been doing for a long time.

Over the course of the past 25+ years, the Bag Lunch Ministry evolved into a hot lunch program. At first, teams of workers were made up solely of parishioners from St. Andrews and



*Preparing food at St. Paul's kitchen (L-R) Unknown, Craig Frey, Ginny Spaulding*

St. Paul's. Within a few years, many other churches asked to be included as a part the Saturday feeding programs. Guidelines were developed. Meetings were held to tweak the ministry into something even better than it was currently. The ministry operated smoothly. Any leftover food was distributed on Sundays. The canned good ministry was still in operation, as most of our "guests" lived in the area near St. Paul's,

and had a need for canned food during the week. In reflecting on my time with this ministry at St. Paul's, I see how deep my love for that parish and those parishioners has been. They had a huge impact on my growth as a follower of Christ. I have seen Christ's hands and feet in action there on many occasions. My family roots at St. Paul's are deep. My mother was baptized there in 1912, my parents were married there in 1933, and my brother was baptized there in 1942. Many memories were made sharing Christ's love in their kitchen and parish hall.



*St. Paul's repainted parish hall and motto still welcomes lunch guests in 2019.*

The kitchen was not in good repair when we began in the late 1980s. By the mid- 1990s, Craig started a campaign to help St. Paul's upgrade their kitchen. Ferguson Enterprises assisted with special prices for new appliances. A new sink was installed, as was a new refrigerator and freezer. The old floor was torn out and a new one installed. A new stainless steel work table replaced the old wooden one. But the work didn't stop with the kitchen. Once completed, our improvements moved to the parish hall. It looked old, the paint looked tired and dingy and was in need of a fresh look. The Williamsburg Blue trim paint made the large room look small. So, Craig and a team of the Fisherman at St. Andrews, with



help from Apprentice School Students and some Navy volunteers, repainted the Parish Hall area. It was a huge job to be undertaken by volunteers, but the results were wonderful! The new paint was a bright looking cream color. New, lighter weight tables replaced the old heavy wooden ones. We scrubbed the old metal chairs of years of dirt and grime. A new water fountain was donated by one of St. Andrew's families. It was a more cheerful place to spend time with friends.



*St. Paul's repainted and refurbished Parish Hall in 2019*

I made friendships through this ministry that endure today. We had many interesting guests. Rudy, the "Bird Man", came weekly dressed with feathers around his neck and pulling his grocery cart. He usually dressed in red. He was always cheerful, and I was saddened to learn of his death several years after the ministry started.

Once the Bag Lunches evolved to hot lunches served on Saturday, St. Andrew's continued to be involved in the weekend ministry. We took our turn making a meal every quarter of the year. We expanded to "Seeds of Hope Breakfasts", which began with grant money from the Diocese of Southern Virginia, and continued with money donated by Carolyn Lackey. Craig and others prepared these Monday breakfasts until he became ill in 2009. Then Brad Norris, myself, and others took over that ministry. During that time, we had help from St. Paul's rector, the Rev. Isabel Steilberg. She and her husband Bob, former Assistant Rector at St. Paul's, had both been very supportive of ministries to the less fortunate. The Monday morning Seeds of Hope Breakfast began with a Bible Study and concluded with prayer. We held hands in a circle and prayed aloud for others, as well as ourselves. One prayer which will stay with me forever was: "Thank you, Lord, for waking me up today, because some didn't." WOW. There was my message for the day. A hot breakfast consisting of eggs, grits, fruit, toast, coffee, and juice, followed the study and prayer.

It has been my honor and privilege to serve with the St. Paul's community over the past 25 years. I have watched as it evolved into several different ministries. Now, as St. Paul's closes its doors, those in need will be seeking other places to find a meal, and a "Safe Place", when they need one. The community there has enriched my life far more than they could ever imagine, and I will miss the Monday morning breakfasts, my breakfast preparation with my friend Brad Norris, (who makes the best grits in town) and who was such a supporter of the ministry. St. Paul's has faithfully lived out the motto which is painted over the stage:

**"To know the Christ and to make Him known."**