

Outreach Report

The Friday Food Ministry continues to provide meals for an average of 80 to 100 guests per week through the efforts of volunteers, including parishioners. St Thomas's is joined by teams from other churches and schools to make this ministry happen. The teams in regular rotation come from St Mary Magdalene's, Trinity College, Massey College, Royal St George's College and the Equinox Holistic Alternative School. Partnerships with these organizations have allowed this ministry to continue to flourish and bring different parts of the wider Toronto community together. As this year goes on, we will continue to look to build new partnerships with other schools, churches, and organizations.

I would like to thank everyone who helps make St Thomas's role in this ministry possible, from those who help prepare, serve, and clean up the meals on Friday, to those who take part in the Thursday Bee to help prepare for Friday's meal, to those who shop for the meal, and those who prepare food at home to serve. In particular I wish to thank Andrew Gray who helps coordinate this ministry. Peter Madgett, who was instrumental in shopping for the Friday meals, moved away and has stepped down from his services to this ministry, and his presence will be missed. Nevertheless, many within the St Thomas's community have stepped in to fill this particular need for the ministry, and their assistance is greatly appreciated. This ministry is vital to the life of our community, and I would like to invite you to join us in this service.

Over the course of this past year there have been many rewards and things to celebrate. In particular, this year's long-weekend barbeques and our Thanksgiving dinner (co-hosted by St Mary Magdalene's) have continued to be the highlights of the year for our guests and are eagerly anticipated. The barbeques are often when we have the most guests present; the second barbecue we had brought nearly 200 guests to our hall.

The biggest challenge for the Friday Food Ministry is that during the summer we need more people from the parish to ensure the ministry continues. Meals during the summer are just as necessary, and arguably more so, for our guests. Though many are working poor and housed (albeit insecurely), during the summer we have guests who come to St Thomas's who are dealing with life on the street or have inadequate housing. During the summer there are fewer shelters open and fewer spaces available that are out of the heat. Dehydration and heat exposure are of major concern, and the summer months can be more lethal for people on the streets than the winter, especially when the temperature climbs, the humidity is high and there is nowhere to go.

Nearly all of our partners are with schools or school-affiliated programs and are not as active in the summer, if at all, which leaves a gap to be picked up by St Thomas's. Furthermore, many Out of the Cold programs close during the summer and do not open until October or November, which means the number of guests we have increases in the summer. This presents many challenges but also great opportunities for St Thomas's to reach out to members of our community who are in need.

In short, during the summer we need additional volunteers to help make up for higher demand and a smaller number of teams.

With this in mind, and considering the challenges and opportunities ahead, I encourage you to consider giving some time to the Friday Food Ministry this summer. I look forward to continuing to work with everyone to serve those of our community in need and to find the beauty of holiness in our service together.

Respectfully submitted,

James Shire