

Sacramental Outreach: Ecclesia Ministries of New York

By TOM KAMM

There are many remarkable Church-based programs compassionately reaching out to address the material needs of the homeless and other seriously disadvantaged people in the Episcopal Diocese of New York.

Through the efforts of Clyde Kuemmerle of St. Ignatius of Antioch, Manhattan, a new ministry called Ecclesia is being brought to NYC. Ecclesia Ministries is based on Common Cathedral, a successful street ministry initiated more than ten years ago by the Rev. Debbie Little in Boston. Kuemmerle, who is the programs coordinator of Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, is serving as executive director of Ecclesia Ministries of New York.

According to its Mission Statement, "[t]he purpose of Ecclesia Ministries of New York is to form and support communities of faith in the State of New York. These communities are to be reflective of the broad spectrum of society, but will be largely made up of the people who live on the streets without suitable shelter or other resources. Each 'church' will worship out of doors in public space; spaces which already attract street people and serve as common ground for meeting and social discourse. These churches will offer the same mutual support, pastoral care, and worship as traditional communities of faith, but with increased emphasis on needs and issues common to the marginalized of our society."

Forming new church communities and spiritually nurturing their new members is at the heart of Ecclesia Ministries' mission. Like Common Cathedral, which celebrates Holy Communion on the grounds of the Boston Common every Sunday, Ecclesia Ministries will celebrate ecumenical Eucharistic services out of doors each Sunday afternoon as well as all major Holy Days. A second meal will then be served from the altar following the conclusion of the Eucharist. The structure of these services is closely based on the Book of Common Prayer and includes a homily and a wide range of hymns from various Christian traditions. The sacrament of Baptism and, when appropriate, Confirmations will also be administered. Baptism and Confirmation classes will be offered as needed and Bible Study Groups are planned.

Important components of each new church community will be pastoral care and counseling of its members on the street, in hospitals, prisons and other places, wherever they are needed. Other supportive initiatives will include twelve-step and occupational development programs, free medical and legal services, connections to housing, and the collection and distribution of food and clothing. These efforts will of course involve significant partnering with various agencies and institutions that have the resources to address the legal problems and the mental and physical illnesses,

including the addictions and assaults, that so terribly afflict the homeless and the seriously disadvantaged wherever they subsist.

The lay and ordained ministers initiating Ecclesia Ministries of New York will be drawn from existing Christian congregations of various denominations. Five congregation-based teams will join in support of each new "church." One week each month, a team from a participating parish/congregation will deploy to an Ecclesia Ministries congregation after having attended services with their own parish that morning. They will worship and provide a meal with their friends in Christ. During the preceding week, the team will have continued reaching out to the new "church" community providing pastoral care, a listening presence, and both spiritual and secular friendship.

To learn more about this opportunity to minister to the marginalized in a profoundly spiritual and sacramental way, contact Ecclesia Ministries of New York at (917) 617-5945 or info@ecclesiany.org.

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July/Aug	July 5
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RMM Anniversary
continued from page 8

The Forefront of the Immigration Debate

As immigration has suddenly become a pressing topic throughout the country, RMM finds itself at the forefront of a struggle that they've been fighting for 25 years.

"We certainly have been more involved around the federal immigration discussion than we ever have been in the past," said Witt. "But in terms of the issues immigration reform is raising, these are issues we've long been involved in. The immigration reform debate is looking to the future and people are raising all sorts of questions about what its impact will be. We've [RMM] been dealing with the impact of many of those provisions for years."

The next 25 years

There is much about RMM's future that is consistent with its past and present. The ministry will remain one of advocacy and empowerment. And that will remain unchanged, according to Fred Wibralske of St. David's, Highland Mills, who has been involved with RMM since its founding, "until the situation improves for farmworkers and the exploitation stops."

Witt has several ideas about what he'd like to see in RMM's future. "We're hoping to find a permanent home for the ministry that would be an educational center that would accommodate our retreats and our training programs, both for our youth and for our adults. A place that would really be home."

The RMM staff currently has a small office outside of Poughkeepsie but most of their time is spent in the communities they serve. "We utilize churches all over the place," Witt said. He added, laughing, "We could probably tell you where every diner is in the diocese, those are our meeting rooms."

Expanding the offerings of the Youth Arts Group is also a priority. Now that the program has college graduates, Witt would like to tap those graduates and future graduates to further strengthen the ministry – and to empower their peers.

Clearly, the energy to meet the demands of the next 25 years is not lacking. "[RMM] is here to strengthen the witness of all of us, whether we be wealthy and privileged, or poor and denied privilege," Witt said. "Whether we be white, black or Latino; whether we be urban or rural. The ministry is a bridge and a catalyst for change to empower all of us to be more capable of responding to God's call, more appreciative of God's call and more excited about God's call."

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