

VOLUNTEER CONNECTION

Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church -- a 20+ year supporter of UMD's Community Café

It's 5 pm on the fourth Thursday of the month. A team from Trinity Avenue Presbyterian Church arrives at Urban Ministries of Durham to make a homemade spaghetti dinner-- for 250 poor and homeless neighbors. They have this down to a science. First up: running hot tap water from both sinks into 20-gallon pots. Back and forth, filling, emptying, refilling until the commercial grade tilt skillet is about half full—that takes a good 10 minutes. Now they can begin boiling water for the noodles. Meanwhile, others are unloading pounds of ground beef, gigantic cans of tomato sauce, peaches and green beans, huge bags of lettuce, and boxes of spaghetti. After washing hands, putting on gloves and hairnets, then donning aprons handmade by members of the church, they go about the business of preparing the meal. For some, this is their first time. For others, this is a monthly occurrence. The sense of fun and camaraderie is pervasive and tonight, Mary Gunderson seems to be the one guiding the crew with her huge and welcoming smile.



This group is part of Trinity Avenue's Outreach Team. Like all of the church's teams, they submit a budget and the church votes. The UMD dinner budget is \$200 per month. Mary explains that doesn't cover the entire meal, but there is a standing announcement in the church bulletin: "The next time you go to Costco, pick up a can of green beans or peaches." What isn't donated by church members, Mary picks up and pays for herself.

Mary makes a beeline for the big walk-in refrigerator in the kitchen. She knows that Chef Larry Williams will have some veggies she can add to the salad. She ferrets out carrots, celery and green pepper and passes those to teammates to begin chopping.

"One time," Mary remembers, "we were out of everything green to serve. All of sudden, ladies from a Catholic youth group showed up with tons of leftover salad. The timing was perfect ... and I thought this is just like the miracle of the five loaves and two fish," a favorite story of hers in the Christian Bible, in which Jesus is said to have fed a crowd of 5,000 by dividing that small amount of food.

Dinner serving groups come from many religious traditions, and from corporations and civic organizations. Like many such groups, Trinity Avenue Presbyterian's help to UMD extends beyond a monthly dinner. The Women's Circle Groups call UMD each month, ask what's on the urgent needs list, and then ask every member to pick up one item. The church also makes financial contributions.

This evening, as the noodles and sauce go into trays to be served, the moment of connection is special. After working a full day, these dedicated volunteers commit their time to come and make sure 100s of people who would've gone to bed hungry have a tasty, nourishing meal, served with a smile.