



NEWS - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COMMUNION IS NOT JUST ABOUT GOING TO MASS AND RECEIVING THE *EUCHARIST* For Us It's About Taking The Meaning Of Communion Out Into The Street

Sydney, Australia,
Wednesday, 9 September 2015

When Valerian Rego, co-founder of the *Gift of Bread* was approached by Paula Nicolas, who heads St Merkorious Charity in Croydon, to supply 300 bags of Lebanese bread every week, his fellowship stepped up to the challenge of helping an organisation that serves 1,000 meals per week to many of Sydney's disadvantaged and poor people.

In this case Baalbek Bakery in Canterbury and Punchbowl donate their leftover bread and Banana Joe's Foodworks in Marrickville generously provide the necessary refrigeration that keeps the bread fresh until it is delivered.

The volunteers who help with the *Gift of Bread* make sure the bread is picked up, packed and delivered every day.

"Our work involves everyone in a simple act of giving and receiving," says Marcel De Maria, founder of the *Gift of Bread*, "It's a 'Moment of Grace' that brings people together in thanksgiving and helps us build strong and caring communities".

"Communion is not just about going to Mass and receiving the *Eucharist*," Marcel explains, "For us it's about taking the meaning of Communion out into the street by living out our Faith and building community with something as simple as *sharing bread*."

This work began about eight years ago with one enthusiastic person, a small car and the leftover bread every Friday night from one of the Baker's Delight stores in Burwood. Today with the help of a growing number of dedicated volunteers they save the bread from many more bakeries who generously donate the leftovers at the end of the day.

The initiative was spearheaded a few years ago by Fr John Pearce CP, Parish Priest at St. Brigid's Marrickville, with the support of the Pastoral Council. Today local parishioners along with parents and students from St Brigid's Catholic Primary School and Casimir Catholic College, all help with the *Gift of Bread* which, currently distributes about 965 bags of bread each week, that's a little over 50,000 bags of bread each year.

"While that's the official count," says Valerian Rego, "We are probably moving in the vicinity of 65,000 bags, because we often have excess bread that we share on top of the regular deliveries".

They also operate a centre from Our Lady of Perpetual Succour (St Mary's on Swanson) in Erskineville, with the support of Fr Barry Brundell MSC, parish priest. "The bread we pack and deliver from here, feeds about 48 families



every week in the housing commission blocks in nearby Waterloo," says Paul Taouk, *Gift of Bread* Coordinator and Family Educator at St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Erskineville.

There is another makeshift centre that is supported by Fr Duncan Wong FSSP, Parish Priest at the Maternal Heart of Mary Parish in Lewisham, and bread is also received, packed and delivered by many of the volunteers who help there.

"Volunteers form the backbone of our organisation." says Nick Tropea, Co-Founder and CFO of the *Gift of Bread*. "Volunteering with the *Gift of Bread* allows you to connect with others, meet new people and build friendships. It's a community event that is socially responsible, makes good use of surplus food and helps to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people around us".

The *Gift of Bread* is a mission of Medius Dei Ltd, a fellowship that was established to attend to persons in need and to serve with humility and solicitude in the words of Jesus Christ: "Love one another. As I have loved you".

The *Gift of Bread* is a basic and simple ministry undertaken by many volunteer men and women, families, young people, students and seniors in the communities and parishes they serve and currently happens with dedication, six days a week, all year round.

If you would like to help or find out more about the *Gift of Bread* please visit www.giftofbread.org

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