



Wednesday Supper: Bethlehem Volunteers Literally Serving People

By: Bruce Pokarney

The numbers are impressive: Roughly 525 meals are prepared every Wednesday evening for an average of 200 people seated in the Fellowship Hall and another 325 people who pick up ready-to-go meals to take home. Bethlehem's Wednesday Night Supper Ministry has been fulfilling a community need for more than 25 years and is arguably one of the church's most impactful outreach efforts. It simply couldn't be done without a team of dedicated volunteers dishing up the food, packing up the take-out meals, preparing and cleaning up afterwards. One of the smiling faces usually seen serving on these special nights is Eric Vetter, who has been volunteering for about 15 years.



"I love doing this because I get to see people, meet them, talk to them," says Eric. "Food is such an important part of a person's life. When you can make sure somebody is getting a good meal, it just makes you feel good to help out."

Two key tenets of Bethlehem's mission are welcoming and serving. The Wednesday Night Supper Ministry certainly checks those boxes. You don't have to be affiliated with Bethlehem to be served or to serve, and there's no cost to the individual. But there is always an opportunity for teaching and worshiping—the other two objectives of the church's mission. Eric likes to say that Bethlehem hopes to feed more than hungry bellies; it hopes to feed hungry souls.

"That means we are a place that welcomes anybody and everybody, whether they are here for just the meal, or whether they want to just be with a friend, or whether they want to stay afterwards and worship at the Wednesday service."

Eric thinks the teaching part of the mission is sometimes connected to simply observing how the Wednesday Night Supper volunteers provide such a vital service.

“I know there have been at least a couple of people who started out just coming here to eat that were inspired and are now currently helping us.”

On a weekly basis, the Wednesday Night Supper Ministry requires four church staff members to prepare the food and supervise the effort, and about 22 volunteers who either serve the sit-down crowd, fill containers for the take-out crowd, clean the dishes, or clean up the tables and Fellowship Hall after the meals have been served, usually around 6:00 pm.



Eric suffered major injuries earlier in his life stemming from a motorcycle accident and has been bound to a wheelchair for the past 32 years. That hasn't stopped him from working on the serving line and putting food on the plates of hungry people.

“There are so many things a person can do sitting down,” he says. “Even with a disability, you can volunteer. Helping people in need helps the church because if the church doesn’t have volunteers, it can’t help people.”

Eric's faith has been at the center of both his volunteer efforts and how he has managed his disability.

“It has made me grow as a person,” he says. “I also credit my parents. They were big at helping other people and taught us kids at a young age that when people need help, you need to help them. **Overall, seeing people in need and helping them has deepened my faith more.**”

Bethlehem's new initiative, through a partnership with Midwest Street Medicine, includes delivering an additional 50 to 80 meals to people who are food insecure in Aberdeen—a number that is expected to increase in 2026. An expanded meal ministry requires additional volunteers. Eric Vetter and the dozens of members of the Bethlehem family who show up on Wednesday evening throughout the year would be happy to welcome others.

For more information on how you can volunteer or donate to Bethlehem's Wednesday Night Supper Ministry, contact Doug Eisenbeisz at (605) 225-9740 or deisenbeisz@bethlehemaberdeen.org

Thank you for being a vital part of Bethlehem and for your support. With your partnership and the power of the Holy Spirit, Bethlehem is touching lives each and every day – connecting us with God, one another, and our mission in the world.



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