

An Unexpected Call: Beyond the Funeral Buffet

One afternoon, right after I had committed the ashes of a beloved parishioner in our Memorial Chapel Garden, our interim Minister of Music motioned for me to meet him in the hallway outside the chapel. Meet him I did, with said parishioner's ashes on my hands. He told me that one of our unhoused neighbors had collapsed in our fellowship hall just beyond the buffet-style lunch prepared for funeral reception.



I hurried to our fellowship hall, and still managed to sneak a glance at what had been prepared. Fresh tossed salad, dinner rolls, seasoned green beans, tender salmon, stewed chicken. I hurried past this food. Food that, no matter how delicious it was or needful it may have been, perishes. *Food that perishes.*

Radical Presence in Action: Responding to a Man in Need

And what did I find? A server who had already called the EMTs ministering to our unhoused neighbor. With a line forming at the buffet tables and folks anxious to dig in, this server left putting the finishing touches on the reception. He saw a man in need. This man, who - collapsed on the floor with his shoes off - was barely coherent, sweating, complaining of chest pains.

I watched as this server listened to our unhoused neighbor and how, little by little, our neighbor's breathing and pains eased. I watched as, slowly, our unhoused neighbor put his shoes back on and began talking coherently with the EMTs who had arrived by time. After taking his vitals the EMTs informed our unhoused neighbor that an ambulance was on the way. Yet, all of us watched in amazement as our unhoused neighbor waved everyone off. He proceeded to walk out of our fellowship hall onto the street.

Unpacking Deeper Hunger: A Profound Realization

It struck me, as I was washing my ashy hands. Our unhoused neighbor, who very well may have been hungry, probably hadn't even seen the food at all. That he may have come into our church, nursing a deeper hunger. And what is more: this server, who had probably come prepared only to serve that sumptuous meal, food that perishes, satisfied our unhoused neighbor's hunger, because he loved our unhoused neighbor as himself. He saw our unhoused neighbor. And, seeing him, loved him. In this server, the truth of [The Rev. Dr. John Claypool's](#) words ran marrow deep: "What happens to you makes a difference to me."

Embracing Radical Presence to All Forms of Hunger

Don't let this story recommend suspicioning callous disregard for the real, physical hunger facing millions of Americans and millions more around the world. Rather, let this story invite you to be radically present to hunger. Volunteer at or donate to food banks or food pantries in your area. Find a food ministry in your parish or start one. Volunteer at a shelter in your area. Join ECF in the annual [Hunger Walk Run](#). Reduce the epidemic of hunger to scale of one. Let your radical presence to someone experiencing hunger of any kind be the broken bread and poured out wine that communicates: "What happens to you makes a difference to me."



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