

# A question about outreach revealed interesting answers



## AILEEN COATES

"Does the church really reach out and help here, in our own community?"

Have you been asked this question? When confronted with it recently, I felt I couldn't answer adequately. So I resolved to do some digging to find out exactly how we at St. Simon's Oakville extend a helping hand in the day-to-day life of the wider community.

## ▲ John MacKenzie, Jill Howe and Pat Lee are ready to serve at the Montclair School "Breakfast Club" nutrition program.

Photo: Janine Maxwell

We all know about food drives, pastoral care and Christmas hampers associated with church outreach. But what else do we do that is hands on, reaching out, at a person-to-person level?

The St. Simon's outreach

program that excites me the most is our breakfast program at Montclair Public School. St. Simon's has been involved in providing breakfasts for school children in Oakville for over 10 years. Financed by a generous donor, we do the rest - planning, volunteer staffing and administration. The whole program is monitored by the Halton Food for Thought organization.

Each week Janine Maxwell, the program coordinator, provides a shopping list to one of the men from our congregation. He shops and then delivers the provisions to the school where they are properly stored for our use.

Every day school is in session, three volunteers from St. Simon's prepare and serve nutritious breakfasts to about 20 students. Everyone is welcome. Some children come every day; others choose to just drop in. Students of all grades attend the

"Breakfast Club", as Janine likes to think of it, so a wide range of ages is represented.

The menu is a varied meatless nutritious one: eggs, pancakes, yogurt, fresh fruit, cereal, cinnamon-raisin toast. And the favourite? Pizzas on pitas! Well, I never would have guessed.

I asked Janine if she sees friendships form amongst the kids. Her reply is swift and unequivocal, "Definitely!"

For her, one of the great joys of being involved in the program is watching children as they progress from kindergarten to the higher grades, gradually develop confidence within the group. They find friends and learn to socialize in a place less formal than a classroom, a place where it is easy to fit in. For those who are newcomers to Canada, this is especially important.

Students take advantage of the breakfast program for a variety

of reasons. For some families it helps financially; other parents are glad to have assistance getting their children prepared for the day. For a number of students, having breakfast there first can actually act as an incentive to attend school.

Another bonus from the Breakfast Club is that members from our church who volunteer there often form a firm bond which carries over into the rest of their lives. So, as well as students who eat breakfast at school, the community that is St. Simon's is also nourished by breakfasts at Montclair.

The answer to my initial question is, simply, yes. We do make a difference in the wider community in a practical way, one breakfast at a time.

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