



Chatham
Habitat
for Humanity®



Raising Faith Stories

Karen Ladd, Former Lay Pastor of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church

I've always loved to cook, and to feed people. It wasn't a big stretch for me to choose, as part of an internship in discernment for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church to volunteer at The Shepherd's Table, the free lunch program at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Raleigh, NC. The Shepherd's Table at that time served between 300 and 350 meals a day, Monday through Friday to homeless, unemployed, day laborers and some folks working in nearby offices. A line forms outside the church an hour or so before the doors open, even in cold and rainy weather.

One day, I was on the serving line, dishing out some vegetables onto someone's plate, when I happened to look towards the door where people were waiting to get in and be fed. I did a second look, and then must have stared at a woman who was just entering. She looked so much like my sister Vicki! Vicki had been diagnosed as schizophrenic at an early age. She had been last seen in Virginia several years before, panhandling, alcoholic, and homeless. My sister Kate and I had done all we could to locate Vicki, but with the exception of a few times when she was in a homeless shelter, or in jail, neither the local Virginia police or any homeless shelter had seen her for a few years.

Now, suddenly, there was this woman, who looked just like Vicki, waiting in line to be fed. My heart leaped. But as I stared at the woman, I realized that it was not my sister. In the next moment, I realized that, although the woman in line was not my sister Vicki, she was my sister in Christ. That was the day that made all the difference in my vocation.

When my internship was over, the Bishop of North Carolina met with me. He told me that I was more suited to a lay ministry, not Holy Orders. I was thrilled to hear that there was a position at St. Bartholomew's Church in Pittsboro as a lay minister, where I would provide pastoral care, education and preaching as a member of the church staff.

One of the first things I proposed to the vestry (the governing board of an Episcopal Church) was to start a Community Lunch. This lunch would welcome everyone, with no questions asked. It was not to be a "soup kitchen" but a place where everyone of any income or no income at all could eat a delicious meal, donating what they could, either in money or as a volunteer. There would be no stigma of having to identify as "poor" to eat at Community Lunch, just a desire to have a meal and a time to socialize with others. Everyone who comes in the door is a face of Christ.

It doesn't take a person with an advanced degree to serve. All it takes is a person with an open heart that is willing to break sometimes, knowing that God will pick up the pieces and make us all more whole. We learned a few years ago that Vicki had died, in Maryland. She is one of the angels that looks over the lunch.

We can help build a stronger community one plate at a time. As one of our volunteers has said, 'The sermon is in the soup.' Or the spaghetti. All are welcome at Community Lunch.