

# COFFEE & COMMUNION

Day Café ministers to those in need of shelter and companionship

Story by Kathryn Marchocki | Photos by Tom Roy



Mark Rüter enjoys his coffee and the atmosphere at the Day Café at St. Patrick Church in Nashua. *Thomas Roy/Parable*

Welcome to  
Patrick Church  
er and Gymnasium

**T**he warm smell of brewing coffee drifts through the St. Patrick Parish Center in downtown Nashua while people gather outside in a thick morning fog.

Soon the center's doors swing open and men and women – most of whom have no permanent homes – stream inside.

The Day Café, a place of hospitality and mercy, is open.

Volunteers and parish staff greet visitors with steaming cups of coffee and snack cakes or fruit bars. They not only know visitors by name, they know how they take their coffee. They ask how things are going. They notice when a regular hasn't shown up in a while.

The din of friendly banter and occasional bursts of laughter soon fill the rooms. A group of men and women resume their long-running card game around a large table. Others talk in pairs or small groups. One young man sits alone, his head on a table.

"This is a good place to kind of congregate and find fellowship," Jason Devost, 42, of Nashua says. "It's a blessing. It brings the community together. Community is the Café's strength." Devost returned to his native Nashua in October 2022 after living in the South.

*The Day Cafe*

*St. Patrick's, Nashua NH*

OPEN

A welcome sign awaits at the rear entrance to the Day Café at St. Patrick Church in Nashua.  
*Thomas Roy/Parable*



A few guests take a coffee and cigarette break on the sidewalk at the Day Café at St. Patrick Church in Nashua. *Thomas Roy/Parable*

“The weather up here is kind of tough on the bones. I’m kind of living on the streets right now,” adds Devost, who volunteers at the Day Café.

Bob Nicolson is a regular at the Day Café — which is open weekdays from 7-9:30 a.m.

“Everybody here, we all get along,” says Nicolson, who parks his rolling walker beside him — a tote bag packed with belongings slung over the handle bars. He says he comes for the “coffee and the atmosphere ... and the feeling of being safe.”

Later that morning, the coffee urns shut down, the tables and chairs get put away, and the doors close. The guests disappear back into the lifting fog.

### BRINGING COMMUNION TO THE COMMUNITY

“That’s the hardest (part) ... closing these doors at 9:30 and I have to tell them to leave,” says volunteer Gary Ballou, 68.

“They understand. But, to me, it’s ‘Now what?’ It’s the loneliness that’s going to happen. What are they going to do? There is a lot of camaraderie going on here. There are friendships formed here,” says the retired Tewksbury, Massachusetts, high school football and track coach and parishioner of St. Patrick Parish.

All of us have a need to be seen or heard. All of us need human connection. That’s what the Day Café offers every weekday morning. People don’t show up there just for the snacks and coffee. They come to ease their isolation, mend their brokenness and forge connections.

“We’re trying to develop a community and culture that recognizes the dignity of the person through human relationships. We desire to bear witness to the love of God through communion and community,” says Adam D’Entremont, pastoral associate at St. Patrick Parish.

“BY BEING IN COMMUNITY WITH EACH OTHER, WE BRING THE PRESENCE OF GOD TO THEM.”

— FATHER MICHAEL KERPER

We are all “poor and broken” in some way, no matter our backgrounds, D’Entremont continues.

“This whole communion of suffering, then, is what draws us into the communion of divine love,” says the 33-year-old, who credits the Day Café in part for his return to the Catholic Church, which he left when he was a teenager.

“It was very providential,” the Hudson native says.

D’Entremont worked for 15 years in tree service and forestry — work that could be very isolating. He felt something missing in his life. About seven years ago, he began to attend Mass at St. Patrick Parish and later volunteered one day a week at the Day Café. Pieces began to fall in place. Then he understood what God’s call for him was.

“God took me from the woods and drew me into the streets,” D’Entremont says. “(It) kind of ended up taking me from being



Carolyn Ekle, a volunteer from Nashua, takes a photo as she brings her dog, Chantal d'Amour, "Song of Love" to meet guests at the Day Café at St. Patrick Church in Nashua. *Thomas Roy/Parable*



Kera Kelley, far left, a clinical RN instructor at Rivier University, packs up for the day with April Cullen, a nursing student at the Day Café at St. Patrick Church in Nashua. *Thomas Roy/Parable*

a very self-centered, isolated individual to living in the sacraments and being present to the Church and the Body of Christ and the community all around us." As pastoral associate, D'Entremont helps open the Café at about 6:30 a.m. every day.

"I don't consider it part of my work," he explains. "It's what guides my work. The Day Café winds up being this communion that I always longed for and I always needed."

## NASHUA'S HOSPITALITY HOUSE

The Day Café opened at St. Patrick Parish Center shortly before Thanksgiving 2020. A similar coffee social in the city had closed. Deb Andrews, one of the volunteers who ran it, heard Father Michael Kerper, pastor of St. Patrick Parish, preach on poverty and asked him if they could reopen the coffee social at St. Patrick's, D'Entremont says.

The Day Café is inspired by and

gets its name from Dorothy Day, an American convert to Catholicism whose cause for sainthood received the support of the U.S. bishops in 2012 and is now before the Vatican.

A journalist and activist, Day died in her native New York City in 1980. She was a committed, believing Catholic who dedicated her life to Jesus Christ's radical call to embrace the poor and to love one another — a call best expressed in *Matthew 25* — which forms the



Bob Nicolson, left, enjoys his coffee with John Lemieux, at the Day Café at St. Patrick Church in Nashua. *Thomas Roy/Parable*

## Servant of God Dorothy Day | 1897-1980

*“The only answer to this life, to the loneliness we are all bound to feel, is community. The living together, working together, sharing together, loving God and loving our brother, and living close to him in community so we can show our love for Him.”*

*The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of the Legendary Catholic Social Activist Dorothy Day, Part III, HarperCollins Publishers, N.Y., 1952.*

To learn more about Dorothy Day, please visit [dorothydayguild.org](http://dorothydayguild.org).

basis of the Church’s social justice teachings, says Father Kerper.

At the height of the Great Depression in 1933, Day co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement, from which came a network of “houses of hospitality” that still exist throughout the country. The houses provide food and shelter to the poor, destitute and others in need. The Day Café is loosely modeled after these hospitality houses.

“The only answer to this life, to the loneliness we are all bound to feel,” Day wrote in her renowned autobiography *The Long Loneliness*, “is community. The living together, working together, sharing together, loving God and loving our brother, and living close to him in community so we can show our love for Him.”

Citing Day as an inspiration for the Café, Fr. Kerper observes, “The theological aspect of the Catholic Worker Movement is they take seriously *Matthew 25*. That’s hard to do,” he says. In *Matthew 25:31-46*, Jesus says we will be judged by whether we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, care for the sick and visit the imprisoned.

“We don’t provide housing. We try to assist people who are in trouble. ... By being in community with each other, we bring the presence of God to them,” Father Kerper says. The Day Café also follows Day’s vision by operating without formal organizational, fundraising or leadership structures, he says.

“We don’t have bylaws. We don’t have anything,” he says. When coffee and snacks run low, Father Kerper says he appeals directly to parishioners at Mass and people respond. Whatever cash donations come in are used to buy coffee cups, lids, stirrers and other supplies.

The Café has established relationships with partners in community health, public health, housing services, substance use treatment and other areas, Father Kerper says. Representatives from these agencies often mingle with the Café's visitors — most of whom struggle with homelessness, substance use and mental health issues — offering help if requested.

Rivier University nursing students often are on-site where, according to Father Kerper, they assist the Café's guests with foot care and other services.

"I like helping patients. I like putting a smile on their faces. I like to change how they feel throughout the day," says Maddy, a junior-year

nursing student who asked not to use her last name.

"My role model was my dad, who was an EMT. I saw the world through him," she says during a visit last October.

For D'Entremont, the essence of the Day Café is relationship. So much of our brokenness, he says, comes from isolation — whether it be physical, spiritual or emotional. "Being in communion is the antidote," he says. Thanks to D'Entremont and his fellow volunteers, each morning from 7 to 9:30 at the Day Café, the coffee is freshly brewed, and people are in communion.

"We have nothing to offer but community and the love of God." ■

→ TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
THE DAY CAFÉ, PLEASE VISIT  
[stpatricksnashua.org/the-day-cafe](http://stpatricksnashua.org/the-day-cafe).

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