

Holy Ground

Every day as I climb into the old van to begin the summer lunch distribution, I am deeply aware that I do not ride alone, for with me rides the community. Rows and rows of brown paper sacks, filled with sandwiches and other luncheon goodies, are wedged in cardboard boxes in the back of the van. Each sack represents a community of many hands working together to connect with hungry children. Each sack holds the expressions of the care, hope, and joy that volunteers devoted to the creation of each one.

I think of the volunteer who comes early to carefully wash apples; and of the many women who, while stuffing the sacks, envision the faces of the children who will get them. I watch as groups of children joyfully glue bright colored stickers on the brown paper bags and then, beside yellow sunshines, in big letters pencil notes expressing love. I remember a group of mentally and physically disabled youth. One was asked to count the sacks and replied in beautiful honesty: "I don't know how to count past ten, but I know how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich." I celebrate their self-esteem. That day, we had many peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

In the back of the van, one box holds fifteen lunch bags, lovingly assembled, brought weekly by three elderly women. White napkins adorn the bags and add to their dignity. Some groups bring as many as six hundred lunches. A little child from Mexico was learning to count in English by holding up each bag one-by-one. Amidst the sandwiches was a new fan quietly placed there by a volunteer who, the day before, had ridden on the lunch route. He saw

and felt the need of so many families who had no screens on their windows and no fans to help combat the heat. A committed community of volunteers daily rides with me. They see a sense of God's presence in the faces of the children we meet each day.

Hope grows slowly, one person at a time, inviting others into the growth. We are challenged to love with dignity, responding to the newness and freshness of each hidden moment waiting eagerly to be born. The rows and rows of brown paper sacks represent the coming together of one community on the way to meet another community. During the moment when the children, with open hands, receive the sacks of food, the ground where we meet becomes holy.