



FACETS OF FAITH

AROUND TOWN

In the borough of Queens, 1,074, 268 people profess membership to some religious denomination. The two profiles offered here, one Jewish and one Catholic, tell vastly different stories, yet they share a common bond by their belief in a transcendent force that guides and motivates all lives.

HUNGER — A CHALLENGE MET

According to the latest figures, of the 78 million baby boomers born after World War II, one in seven relies on Food Stamps. Between 2008 and 2009 in the borough of Queens, over

195,610 people swelled the growing ranks of New Yorkers applying Food Stamps. Statistics released by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger indicates that 1.4 million city residents face food insecurity on a daily basis. Of this number, 400,000 are children throughout the five boroughs.

Locally, these discouraging numbers take on an even greater significance for Alexander Rapaport, Executive Director of the kosher soup kitchen Masbia. "I have an annual budget of \$300,000 to work with, and believe me; I stay awake nights figuring out how I'm going to cover all the bills. The rent alone is \$5,000." Located at 98-08 Queens Boulevard in the Rego Park section of Queens, Masbia (meaning to satisfy) provides a unique and dignified approach in dealing with the issue of hunger. Resembling an upscale restaurant rather than a traditional soup kitchen, Masbia offers clients' generous portions of food carefully prepared according to rabbinical law.

Funded by The Henry & Susie Orenstein Emergency Food Kitchen Network, along with contributions from a family that wishes to remain anonymous, Masbia began operating at its present location in May of 2010. Hot meals are available to all people in need without regard to religious affiliation, race or ethnic background. With a staff of dedicated volunteers, this facility is often taxed to its capacity. Open for meals from 4PM to 8:30PM Sunday through Thursday, Masbia attracts a high number of senior citizens during the day light hours; many of whom arrive with walkers and canes. "Our older clients often feel vulnerable during the night and try to only go out during daylight hours," Rapaport explains. "After 7 o'clock is when we see a younger crowd of people, often with children, start to arrive." In addition to in-house meals, Masbia also provides people with groceries for at home consumption.

Bearing no resemblance to the austere starkness the term "soup kitchen" usually conjures up, Masbia contains ten large tables, each sitting groups of up to four people. With hardwood flooring and various paintings of scenes from Israel on walls painted a warm yellow; this establishment offers an inviting ambiance that is specifically designed to respect all visitors. "The dignity of each man, woman and child has always been very important to Mr. Orenstein," states Rapaport. "That's why each table setting has a curtain our clients can close if they so choose," he explains. "We want to give people their right to privacy; most of the time though, because so many of our visitors know each other, the curtains are rarely pulled shut."

Meals offered at Masbia are often comparable with and in many cases superior to dishes served at local restaurants. The hearty stew known as Cholnet, requires a half day of cooking time. This is an important time factor insofar as it must be prepared before the Sabbath begins to meet the Torah demand that bans cooking or other work related activities on that day. Traditionally, this popular and satisfying dish contains meat, potatoes, beans and barley; rice and chicken are optional. Originating in Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish cultures, this nutritious meal is served on Thursday evenings at Masbia; it is a favorite food item with clients and staff members alike.

Masbia, in conjunction with its sister organizations in Boro Park, Flatbush Midwood and Williamsburg, Brooklyn, has served over 250,000 meals and represents a local response to a national problem of hunger. Based on religious faith, Masbia offers itself as a unique and much needed solution for the growing problem of hunger in America. To learn more about Masbia or to make an online donation, please visit their website at www.masbia.org. To make a donation of \$10, text SOUP to 20222.

OCTAVES OF FAITH

Located on 61st Road, in the Rego Park section of Queens, parishioners at the Roman Catholic Church of Resurrection-Ascension endure the periodic rumblings of the Long Island Railroad and the ever-present drone of traffic from the eight-lane expanse of Woodhaven Boulevard. Yet every Sunday morning, and on major religious holidays, the noise of the city gives way to the sounds of an ordinary miracle. Homemakers, students and working people, united in faith, motivated by God and directed by choir master Emanuel Bologna, come together as a 12-person ensemble to share and celebrate their faith with one voice—and what a voice it is. Impassioned, engaging and vibrant, the sound of each individual contributes to a collective call for worship that is at once compelling, inspiring and downright inviting.

Disavow any image of a Sister Act movie scenario; this group knows what they're doing. Rehearsing for several hours on a weekly basis, the singers in this choir bring over a century of combined talent to their recitals. Among their ranks is professional lead singer Patricia Kistner, avuncular and gifted with an angelic smile and voice, she has over ten years of professional experience in singing for the Brooklyn/Queens diocese. "I sing," she notes, "because it makes me feel really good. Our choir members bring in a lot of dedication, and I think that's very apparent to the people in church." Her sentiments are also echoed by fellow chanteuse Sister Barbara Buckbee CSJ, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph from Brentwood, Long Island. With 21-years of experience as a choir member she says, "I sing for the love of God and for my friends." Like any group of human beings, their commitment to the divine is often tested by the challenges of distractions. "I don't mind babies crying, although that can be very irritating, but I really, really object to the sound of cell phones going off. What's even worse is that people think nothing of taking the call," states fellow choir member Judy Belon.

The membership of Resurrection-Ascension's choir reflects the broad mosaic of Queens. John Linahan, the only male singer in the group, is employed by ABC-TV

Despite the fine schools she attended and the higher social class Ferraro mingled with, she maintained a down-to-earth demeanor. Folks whom she had over for dinner recall being greeted by Ferraro as she walked into the living room sporting a kitchen towel or pot holder.

In 2001 when her health became an issue, she sold her house and moved into Manhattan. Ferraro told Terrace Realty agents, Dolores Carroll and Linda Weiss, who were selling the property to "call me Gerry." When showing prospective buyers her house she mentioned that some of the secret service personnel slept in her basement while they were assigned to her as she campaigned for the vice-presidency. Some may even remember the trailer that was always parked across the street during this time. Its presence prevented teenagers from hanging out in Olivia Park after sundown. Neighbors like Dennis Clair of Burns Street recalls making friends with the secret service crew as well as schmoozing with Gerry and John as he walked his dog Prince and they walked their dog, Sammy. He also related a funny incident that took place while Ferraro was deep in her vice presidential campaign. One afternoon while Clair was walking along Queens Blvd., he heard one of the secret service men's voice over a car's loudspeaker saying, "Hey, Prince."

Ferraro continued her political career by running for the Senate twice but was not successful either time. Is it a coincidence that one of New York's past

senators, Seymour Thaler, also once lived on Deepdene Road?

She and Zacarro renewed their wedding vows in 1985 at their family parish, Our Lady of Mercy, in front of friends and family. She conducted numerous fundraisers at Joe Abbracciamento, a famous restaurant on Woodhaven Blvd., and remained friends with the Abbracciamento family over the years. When a post office in Long Island City was renamed in Ferraro's honor last year she arranged for the Abbracciamento restaurant to cater the affair.

Last year when Forest Hills Gardens celebrated its 100th year anniversary, Ferraro was approached to speak at the "Party of the Century" event that was held at the Community House. However, she declined due to health reasons.

Countless Austin Street and Metropolitan Avenue shoppers remember standing in line with her at checkout counters. I for one had the pleasure of being in the produce aisle with Ferraro at The Natural supermarket. She was too busy inspecting vegetables to notice my amazement. I didn't say hello because I was in shock. I did, however, see Ferraro years later after she moved out of the Gardens. While I was walking along Fulton Street in downtown Manhattan I spotted Ferraro walking into Century 21. I seized the opportunity to tell her I missed seeing her in Forest Hills. I hope my article reflects the sentiment that we all miss seeing her.

and has sung in the choir for 24 years. Edith Casines, who sings with uncommon passion, is originally from Venezuela. Rita Geraghty, a local resident of Rego Park, can measure her time in this choir in terms of generations. "I've been singing here at RA for over 35 years," she says. One of the newest and youngest members of the group is Caroline Lara, a college student currently studying to become a math teacher.

Although the choir sings on a year-round basis, all members agree that the Easter season is the busiest. "With Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we double up on performances and on rehearsals," says choir director Emanuel Bologna. A veteran music director for the Brooklyn/Queens diocese Bologna's expertise in sacred music earned him a rare opportunity several years ago: He played the organ for the welcoming ceremonies of Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to New York City in 2008. Quiet, self-effacing and gifted with an unusually low-key sense of delivery, he quietly recalls the event as a "very moving experience."

Participation is a key element and long-term goal for all members of this highly gifted choir. "We're not here just to entertain people," states Patricia Kistner. "We want to sing, yes, but we also want the people in church to join in and sing along with us." The choir's high level of talent and dedication, animated by individuals of various ages, experiences and viewpoints is emblematic of the borough's ability to celebrate diversity. At the same time, this choral group is a point of reference for common bonds and represents a shared commitment to faith, ethics and values. *Alleluia!*

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