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St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine Helps Neighbors in Need with Food and Supply Distribution through Midnight Run



On Sunday, March 9, 2025, at six o'clock in the evening the sun began to set in lower Manhattan and the bright light of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine began to glow. City workers bustle around the area, heading home after a long day, but among the bustling pedestrians are volunteers heading to St. Nicholas for its monthly food distribution run for the homeless.

The food distribution program officially started in October 2024 and St. Nicholas has hosted it every month since. Through the organization Midnight Run, the St. Nicholas team receives food items and are advised on where to distribute the food they prepare. St. Nicholas accepts clothing and other essential care items from parishioners and anyone else who would like to donate, and Liberty Bagels generously provides cold cuts and cheese for the sandwiches. Midnight Run coordinates over 1,000 distributions per year, in which volunteers from churches, synagogues, schools and other civic groups distribute food, clothing, blankets and personal care items to those experiencing homelessness in New York City.

About twenty volunteers, mostly young adults, gathered for this month's food preparation and distribution. Parish priest, Rev. Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical

Throne, Fr. Andreas Vithoulkas led the group in prayer, thanking God for the opportunity to gather and uplift our neighbors who need assistance.

Parish Council member Christina Halatsis guided the volunteers in preparing the food for distribution as well as clothing and hygiene products. The volunteers were so efficient they went through all of the bread that they had for use, purchased more, and went through it again within an hour. Many people were participating for the first time, but the sense of community and fellowship in faith made it seem as though everyone in the room were old friends.

Married couple Maxim Calixte and Siying Qu are catechumens attending St. Nicholas prayerfully awaiting their christening on Lazarus Saturday of this year. Siying's mother married a Greek man from Sifnos, which prompted many trips to the beautiful island. While on the island, the couple attended an Orthodox service and made the decision to convert to Orthodoxy. Maxim discovered St. Nicholas when walking by the Ground Zero memorials and was captivated by the structure of the church, but especially impacted by the leadership and culture of the St. Nicholas parish. "We love Fr. Andreas and Fr. Samuel who challenge us spiritually and intellectually," Maxim stated.

Mother and daughter Sabrina and Althea Michals who attend St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Ocean, New Jersey were among the first time participants. They swiftly packed sandwiches as if on an assembly line. A young toddler with his father wandered the room and cheerily helped put sandwiches in bags for distribution. Two young women from New York University took sandwiches for distribution to neighbors they knew would need them around Washington Square Park.

Those who remained for the distribution headed to areas near Herald Square as well as the Antonio Olivieri Center, a drop-in center with a soup kitchen, showers, and other services.

Paula Pieper, originally from South Carolina, but who now attends St. John the Baptist Church in Gramercy, stated the distribution is very special and dispels myths often perpetuated about those experiencing homelessness. The people the volunteers encounter are friendly and excited to chat. This is her second time participating in the distribution.

Paula's biggest takeaway from these experiences are the connections she builds with the other participants. "It is a really fun way to bond with people and have something in common that is unspoken-to help a greater good," Paula stated.

The monthly food distribution at St. Nicholas brings together people from all walks of life to follow Christ's example and what he demands of us; "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:35-36.

The next food and supply distribution will take place this Sunday, April 6, 2025 at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at Ground Zero. Discover future events by subscribing to the St. Nicholas newsletter [here](#).

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Photos: Orthodox Observer.

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