

# THE NEW YORKER

Our Local Correspondents

## HUNGRY MINDS

*Tales from a Chelsea soup kitchen.*

**by Ian Frazier May 26, 2008**

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS about the soup kitchen at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Chelsea. The Church of the Holy Apostles, at the corner of Twenty-Eighth Street and Ninth Avenue in Manhattan, is a church only two-sevenths of the time. The other five-sevenths—every weekday including holidays—it is the largest soup kitchen in New York City. It serves an average of about twelve hundred meals a day. The writer knows about the soup kitchen because he is one of the teachers of a writing workshop that meets there on Wednesdays in the spring. The writer tells about sitting by the door of the church with flyers to publicize the workshop and describes the responses he has received from guests leaving after lunch. One such man claimed to have been taught by John Cheever in the Ossining prison in the seventies. The writer estimates that in fourteen years, four hundred soup-kitchen guests have participated in the workshop. He gives examples of former workshop participants: Sundance, a hobo, who wrote about etiquette in hobo camps; Donald, who penned a book-length manuscript entirely in blue ball-point using large block capitals; Tory, whose piece about her brief stint as a backup dancer for Lionel Richie and the Commodores always brought down the house. Writer describes the workings of the workshop and tells about former participants who have died. Gives a history of the church and its surrounding neighborhood. The church's initial construction was completed in 1848. Mentions the Ninth Avenue elevated steam train, which started up in 1871. Reformers like Jacob Riis spoke at Holy Apostles. From that point, the church inclined to the leftist, progressivist beliefs of the Social Gospel. Tells about Holy Apostles' financial troubles over the years, mentioning several of the church's rectors, including Foster Thayer, Lucius A. Edelblute, and Father Rand Frew, who first suggested that the church start a soup kitchen, in 1982. Describes a fire that severely damaged the church in 1990 and the four-year reconstruction. The soup kitchen needs at least forty volunteers to serve every meal. Tells about the counseling services offered by the soup kitchen. To keep going, the kitchen needs two million six hundred thousand dollars a year. About thirty-five per cent of the money comes from individual donors. Most of the rest comes from foundations and government agencies. The current rector, Father William Greenlaw, describes the work of feeding the hungry in terms that people are likely to agree on regardless of religious belief. The soup kitchen never proselytizes or hands out religious literature. Writer describes the reading that is held at the end of the writers' workshop every year. The alchemy of writing gives everybody who's been in the workshop an extra dimension: along with possessing a name and a face, each is also the particular person who wrote whatever.

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