

# Community Voices with Curt Palm: Congregation Emeth serves hot meals Christmas Day at St. Joseph's

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At the Lord's Table, a hot meal program operated by St. Joseph's Family Center in Gilroy, Santa Claus is Jewish. For more than two decades, Congregation Emeth, based in Morgan Hill and serving the South Valley, has cooked up and served a Christmas Day meal so the staff of St. Joseph's and St. Mary's School, where the meals are served, can have the day off to spend with family and friends.

Twenty-three years ago, Susan Meyers of Congregation Emeth met with the sisters from St. Mary's Catholic Church who provide the Christmas Day meal at the Lord's Table. She explained to them that Congregation Emeth was happy to decorate, cook, serve and clean up on Christmas since the Jewish congregation doesn't celebrate Christmas and would love to give the sisters a break so they could celebrate their holiday. That first year, the sisters stayed with the volunteers from Congregation Emeth and walked them through the process.

Over time the event grew. Congregation Emeth purchases more than a dozen turkeys every year, which members cook in addition to other delicious dishes. A toy and warm clothing drive also takes place. Santa even makes an appearance. Every child who attends the meal receives a gift and adults are welcome to blankets and clothing. Each year, about 25 Congregation Emeth members participate so the Christmas meal can serve about 200 people.

Susan and her husband organized the Christmas meal for several years until Emeth members Michael Heil and Bette Gardner took over for a few years.

Recently, Geoff and Sandra Jackson lead the volunteer effort and this year my wife Nancy Altman-Palm and I are taking the reins.

Members of Congregation Emeth volunteer every Christmas Day serving hot meals to those in need in the South Valley at Gilroy's The Lord's Table.

Under the Jackson's leadership, the annual volunteer event grew into a monthly volunteering opportunity with some community members going far beyond the call of duty. MariaElena Jarson and her family volunteer frequently at the Lord's Table and the guests have come to truly enjoy seeing her and her children.



Not only does MariaElena donate her time, but she also brings important supplies for guests like water and toiletries.

Rabbi Debbie Israel of Congregation Emeth, so moved by her congregation's commitment to charity and service, made sure the congregation's budget now supports a monthly purchase of fresh produce and healthy beverages for the Lord's Table.

"It's a wonderful tradition — a mitzvah — a way for us to involve our children in a program that gives to our community," said Susan Meyers, reflecting on her years of involvement with the event.

Geoff is proud to see the congregation gather together to give back to the community. He's especially thankful that with all their hard work they can serve the needy, but also have time to schmooze with guests and get to know their neighbors. It's one thing to roast a turkey and put it on a plate. True community, however, is built when you have genuine connections between people. He along with all of Congregation Emeth look forward to another 20 years of partnership with the Lord's Table and beyond.

*Curt Palm is a member of Congregation Emeth. He wrote this for Morgan Hill Life.*