



Official Newsletter of the MANNA COMMUNITY of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul

For the past 4 years I have had the joy and privilege of spending Christmas Eve with the MANNA community at our Living Room Scene gathering. In the weeks leading up to Christmas we talk openly about how challenging this time of year can be, especially for folks who live on the street and in shelters, and for those of us who have broken family relationships. We acknowledge that not everyone will be “feeling the spirit” in the same way, or maybe not at all. There have been certain years of my own life where I felt more sadness than joy as the Christmas season approached, and I know very deeply the discomfort of holding heartbreak in the midst of others’ joyful celebrations. The Living Room Scene is a gathering where all emotions are welcome, and space is made for each. Community members help prepare snacks, create decorations, and offer companionship to one another in a “living room” of our own making. In one corner of the room folks sing carols around a piano while others talk quietly about their hopes and fears for the coming year. Together we create a space that welcomes each one of us as members of God’s family as we prepare to welcome our brother Jesus, who teaches us what it means to be vulnerable, new, and divinely human, into each of our lives and hearts. This year we look forward to continuing to find family in one another, in our darkest days and brightest moments, with help from God, who made us, who loves us, and who invites us to become more fully ourselves in the company of those who journey alongside us. Thank you for being a part of the MANNA family. Thank you for helping us continue to walk in the ways of love.

Gratefully,  
MANNA Chaplain Christie Towers

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# MANNA TEAM UPDATE

## A Reflection from MANNA Volunteer, Photographer Edward Boches



Edward Boches is a Boston-based street and documentary photographer.

Interested in how photography can connect us, help us understand each other, and inspire empathy, he has photographed such diverse communities as inner-city boxers, former gang members, Black Lives Matter activists, transgender men and women, pro-choice advocates, shellfishermen, and the Black Seed Writers. He makes it a point to meet and photograph at least one stranger every day.

I came to my first Black Seed Writers session just over a year ago. As a photographer, I was really only thinking about the opportunity to make pictures. But by my second week it became apparent that MANNA and the members of this incredible community offered me so much more than subjects for a photography project.

The writers I've met on the steps and the in basement of the church have endured, survived and experienced life in ways many of us will never know. Some have overcome addiction, struggled with mental illness, served time. All have known the challenge of finding a doorway or bench, subway station or makeshift tent, to spend the night. While many are in various states of transition, more than a few remain rough sleepers.

Those I've come to know have willingly shared their personal stories. Those stories, full of insights into the human condition, have inspired me to think far more deeply about homelessness, about comforts I take for granted, about biases I didn't know I had. Scribbling, typing and reading their poems, essays and narratives is for me a new gift every week.

But it's more than the stories themselves that keep me coming back every Tuesday morning. It's the kindness, consideration and friendship of the writers. Geno greets me with his huge smile. Richie rushes over with news of his latest volunteer work. Bryant chimes in with some clever comment from his endless arsenal of wisecracks. Jan shares a new political insight. Laurel never neglects to ask how I've been and how my family is doing. And if I miss a week, more than a few of the writers let me know they missed me and ask if I'm ok.

Getting to know each and every one of writers has been a joy. I owe a debt of gratitude to all of them, along with James Parker, Rev. Jennifer McCracken, and Christie Towers for letting me become a Black Seed Writer.

- Edward Boches



# Day of Gratitude -- We are thankful for YOU!



**MANNA** would like to extend a giant **THANK YOU!** to all of the volunteers who helped us celebrate community on our Day of Gratitude!



**Thank you, especially, to the Black Seed Cafe and the Jum'ah Prayer Community, who provided, prepared, and helped to serve our meal!**





## Review: Incredible Reading 12/6/23 by Black Seed Writers at Copley Library

What an experience, reminds me of Jimi Hendrix, that Wednesday, December 6, 2023 at 6pm in the Rabb Auditorium, great venue, Boston Public Library, Copley Square. More than a reading, agrees my spouse, a poet of over half a century who's been in or at hundreds of readings. Edward Boches' incredible photography of Black Seed Writers on a slide show encouraged and calmed us as we waited in the first three rows for our turn to read; we couldn't help feeling a little nervous about reading too fast, crying, tripping or falling etcetera as our portraits came up on the slides, we were soon cheering each other on, similar to Tuesday afternoons. One writer, a bit nervous, looking down at his writing, was informed he was up, referring to a photo of him although the writer at first thought he was up to read; when he saw his photo, a smile replaced the fear. Excellent master of ceremonies, James Parker of THE ATLANTIC – what an encourager! (What a crazy artist to do this?) James puts us at ease. Christie Towers helps writers and rounds up our writings as co-editor of THE PILGRIM and gathers us – no easy task, like trying to herd cats. Some Black Seed writers are homeless – spending the night outside this very library. Some are disabled – some both homeless and disabled. What a hodgepodge! Devin's writing mesmerized us; he took the listeners with his as good writers do. Richie got the audience involved. Howard did a great reading, as did Claire and Jimmy, Angie, Avi, Ishmael, and Rebecca. Maria sang music she had created from a poem by Bryant. Wendy flew in to see Bob and us. After church at the Episcopal Cathedral, 138 Tremont, opposite Boston Common, site of the Black Seed Writers every Tuesday morning, including breakfast, Bryant and I thanked Cassie and Danielle for managing to get there on time to be the last readers; Cassie pushes a manual wheelchair with Danielle in it and this is very strenuous. Roger read from one of his books as time was needed for Danielle's wheelchair to be raised to stage height. Cassie recognized and acknowledged Christie's help, including with writing. So the reading was more than a reading; it was the experience of a community, gathered and nurtured by Edward Boches, James Parker and Christie Towers. What a trio: Christie, Edward and James.

Reminds me of another Trio I kind of know....

Jan Rowe 12/13/23



**The Pilgrim** FROM THE HOMELESS COMMUNITY OF DOWNTOWN BOSTON

Visit [thepilgrim.org](http://thepilgrim.org) to subscribe to *The Pilgrim*

# Partnership Spotlight: All Saints Brookline

All Saints Brookline began serving with MANNA's Monday Lunch Program in the fall of 2016. We give thanks for the faithful work of the founding members of their group, Ginny Adams, Mary Urban Keary, Fran Bancroft, Sharon Siwec, and Kathleen O'Connor, and are grateful for the addition of Nancy Snudden, Mary Wellman, and Karen Skillins. We are blessed by the presence of Harold Petersen who spends his time with the Black Seed Writers Group. Thank you for providing us with a healthy, delicious meal and for serving alongside our community for so many years. We could not do this without you!

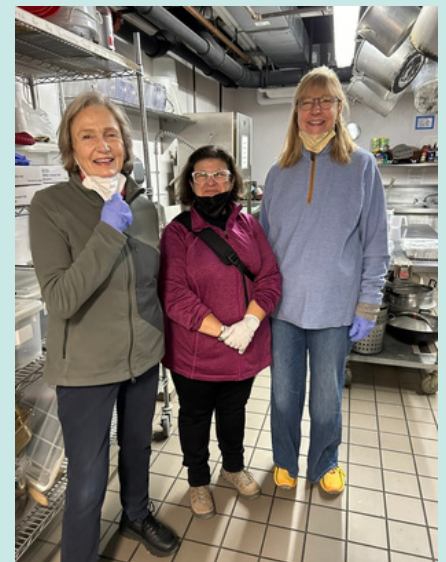


Ginny Adams, Mary Urban Keary, Fran Bancroft, Sharon Siwec, and Kathleen O'Connor



In the kitchen with Fran, Mary Wellman, Kathleen, Ken, Bruce Keary, and Mary UK!

Karen Skillins is also a volunteer with the Black Seed Writers Group. Karen first started visiting us with Harold, and soon started volunteering her time, alongside her friend and longtime volunteer Mary Wellman, and others, serving at Monday Lunch. Karen says of her time serving with MANNA, "We all have a good time and I always leave with a smile on my face." She notes that the community kitchen staff is always friendly, and that she enjoys serving alongside them. We appreciate the joy that Karen brings to the group and her enthusiasm for inviting friends along! Pictured here is Kim, a long time friend of Karen's who joined us during a visit from out of town. Thank you to these friends of MANNA, and to everyone at All Saints who help bring joy to our community through food and fellowship. We are so grateful for your love and support!



Mary, Kim and Karen ready to serve at Monday Lunch!

## Reflection from Harold Petersen, All Saints Brookline Parishioner and Volunteer at the Black Seed Writers Group

I first came to the Writers Group in April 2017. I had known Rev. Tina Rathbone for some time and through her had met James Parker and heard their story about the founding of the group. They had both urged me to come, but I had held back, telling myself I would be out of place. I was not homeless and not part of the staff, so what would I be doing there? In short, I was intimidated.

Finally, I screwed up my courage and came on a Tuesday morning. I was enthralled and I kept coming back. I couldn't believe how welcome I was made to feel. I did some writing myself and found it rewarding. On some days I wrote and on some I was just there—a resource if someone wanted the spelling of a word, a listener if someone wanted to share their story. Writers began to share their work with me and I developed some deep and lasting friendships.

I would come away refreshed and eager to come again. Here was a group of writers, some of whom were homeless, some formerly homeless, and some on the brink. They were writing, turning in what they wrote, and then seeing it in print the next week. And then some of it would get published in their journal, *The Pilgrim*. As an academic, I knew what a meant for a writer to see their work in print, and I could certainly see it here. I not only saw it, but I felt it and I breathed it in the air around me. There was no sense of class or race or gender. This was a group of writers, united in their determination to express themselves and rewarded with an immense sense of accomplishment.

At some point I guess I became a volunteer. I was invited to a meeting to discuss the role of volunteers and I was given a copy of the rules. I am not much for rules, but I could appreciate the need for structure and even for limits. I am a bit uncomfortable with the notion of my being called a volunteer, since I get so much more from the writers than I could ever hope to give. I feel a huge sense of gratitude, both to James and to Rev. Tina and to Rev. Jennifer and to Christie, and also, and most especially, to the writers, for accepting me and for being my friends. Your love, and your acceptance, mean the world to me.

-Harold Petersen, Parishioner at All Saints Brookline



All smiles with Harold at BSWG!



Harold and Troy catch up at BSWG!

## Seasonal Clothing Donation Guide

As cooler weather approaches, our need for warm and weatherproof clothing will increase. If you would like to help us keep our unsheltered siblings warm and dry this season, please consider donating items from our Amazon wish list at this web address:

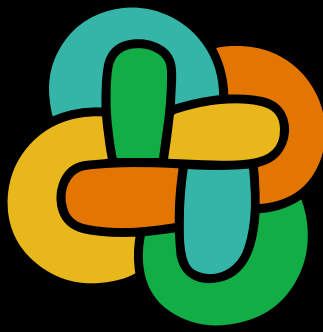
[Bit.ly/mannawishlist](https://bit.ly/mannawishlist)

Many of our community members spend the majority of each day and night outdoors. Your donations from our wishlist will help ensure the safety of those most exposed and vulnerable to seasonal changes and weather events.

**We are especially in need of hats, new sweatpants, women's leggings, and sweatshirts .**

While used clothing is acceptable, we ask that any donations of used clothing be discussed with Rev. Jennifer or Chaplain Christie before prior to donation.  
[jmccracken@diomass.org](mailto:jmccracken@diomass.org) / [ctowers@diomass.org](mailto:ctowers@diomass.org)





# MANNA

## ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HELPING US CONTINUE OUR WORK?

CHECK OUT OUR AMAZON WISH LIST TO HELP US CONTINUE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY:  
**[BIT.LY/MANNAWISHLIST](https://bit.ly/mannawishlist)**

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PARISH PARTNER, OR VOLUNTEERING, PLEASE CONTACT REV. JENNIFER MCCRACKEN AT [JMCCRACKEN@DIOMASS.ORG](mailto:JMCCRACKEN@DIOMASS.ORG)

OR DONATE TO MANNA BY VISITING:  
**[HTTPS://WWW.MANNABOSTON.ORG/DONATE](https://www.mannaboston.org/donate)**

OR SCAN THE QR CODE WITH YOUR CELL PHONE CAMERA

THANK YOU!



Photo by Edward Boches



## **A NEW BEGINNING** *by Manuel P.*

A new beginning is getting rid of all of the old -- that's when new things begin to unfold.

A new beginning is when you can make better goals.

Even when there's a bump in the road, just remember you're making better goals.

Just remember it's a new beginning and a new road.