"There but for the grace of God, go I"

Philoxenia Times

Winter 2025-2026

Philoxenia's volunteers at our fifth annual Thanksgiving Pop-Up Pantry on November 21. Details on page 2.

President's Message

We hope you had a Happy Thanksgiving and are ready for the December holidays!

Philoxenia is wrapping up a busy second half of 2025. As you'll read in this edition, we provided thousands of meals to our neighbors since July. We will conclude our 2025 programs with our annual Christmas Eve dinner for the residents at Jan Peek House, Northern Westchester's only homeless shelter.

None of this would be possible without the extraordinary generosity of our friends and donors – your support is what turns hope into action.

On behalf of our board, thank you for all that you do to support Philoxenia, and we wish you the best for the holidays and a very Happy and Healthy 2026!

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Scenes from Philoxenia's 2025 events to date.

Down the Stretch: Philoxenia Concludes 2025 Programs – But the Demand Continues

The second half of 2025 revealed an ever-increasing demand for more resources to help feed and clothe New Yorkers in need. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and elbow grease of our volunteers, Philoxenia has continued to answer the call.

– 170+ families and neighbors in East Harlem will celebrate Thanksgiving and beyond — thanks to your support.

On November 21, Philoxenia Inc partnered with **Goodwill Industries of Greater New York and Northern New Jersey** and the employees of **BakerHostetler** for a Pop-Up Pantry to give our community large bags of multiple-meal shelf-stable food, fresh produce, certificates for free turkeys, dental kits from the **New York State Dental Foundation**, toothbrushes and hygiene products from **Annunciation NYC Philoptochos**, warm socks from **Bombas**, and incredibly beautiful hand-knit winter hats from **Beth Huffman**.

- On September 27, we held our Pop-Up Pantry at **LEFSA** in Harlem where we distributed 163 bags of groceries, socks and hygiene kits. Fresh produce and shelf-stable items in the bags provided several meals for families. Special thanks to our partners: **Archdiocesan District Philoptochos**, **Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church**, **Bombas** and the **Archdiocesan District Young Adult League**.

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Down the Stretch *(continued)*

- Our July 18 Midtown Pop-Up Pantry was a success! Philoxenia Inc volunteers, in close cooperation with our amazing hosts at **St. George Greek Orthodox Church** and in partnership with **Bombas** and the **New York State Dental Foundation**, handed out over 150 bags filled with shelf-stable food, fresh produce, comfortable socks and toothbrush kits to our neighbors in need in Hell's Kitchen.

In parallel distributions across Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Avenues, we were blessed with the opportunity to talk with community members and provide them with the materials for at least a dozen meals in each bag.

Community Conversations: Marc Greenberg, Executive Director, Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness & Housing; President, Interfaith Affordable Housing Collaborative

I**Marc Greenberg** is the Executive Director and co-founder of the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and housing. Since the Assembly's establishment in 1985, Marc has been addressing homelessness through advocating public policy solutions and other strategies in partnership with an ever-broadening network of faith communities, other advocates, housing and service providers, elected officials and those who have experienced homelessness.

In addition to being one of the nation's foremost leaders in the fight against homelessness, Marc has been an invaluable friend to and supporter of Philoxenia's mission. We were thrilled to welcome Marc for this edition of Community Conversations.

1. We are fairly sure you are Philoxenia's first Community Conversations guest who attended the original Woodstock festival. What are your memories of how that signature cultural event made you feel in terms of bringing people together?

I appreciate this question. At age 18, I was certainly an idealist and had some experience being a sort of a local "community leader," but my experience at the Woodstock festival affirmed for me the validity of some of my deepest ideals.

In the midst of an instant community of nearly a half a million people, I experienced what I have come to call the "group mind" - I learned that an idea, if broadly shared, can very easily, and almost efortlessly, become a reality. On at least three occasions (which i helped initiate) during this three-day magical adventure, I learned that in a communal and supportive environment, people will collectively work for good for each other. And further, that there is a palpable joy to it. This has carried through my entire life.

Community Conversations: Marc Greenberg *(continued)*

2. The Interfaith Assembly has been committed to what you've called a more "person-centered approach" to homelessness to ensure New York City is providing humane responses to those living on the streets. Could you please share what, in your view, this approach should ideally include?

My efforts regarding hunger and homelessness began at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1982 with my organizing of the "Thanksgiving food forum" during which we held a series of panels discussing hunger and served 1,100 meals the day before Thanksgiving. This first experience of being "in community" with so many hungry members of our human family touched me deeply in my being and has stayed with me to this day and inspired me to pursue the issue of homelessness, which led the Assembly's founding in 1982/83 as a means to "bear witness to the homeless crisis." In the face of growing homelessness, soup kitchens, welfare hotels, shelters and people on the streets and subways, we asked the question "no matter what your faith, is this what God is asking us to do"? In 1985 we decided to hold an overnight vigil in City Hall Park as the NYC budget was being finalized - to publicly ask this question and ask the city to consider the needs and lives of those without homes. And this overnight vigil was subsequently held annually for 28 years. But in 1988, this overnight vigil turned into a 200-day City Hall Park encampment - from June 1st to Christmas Day - that was led by a community of close to 30 individuals with no homes. Working with these people over the next nine months, led me and our partners with New York Catholic Charities to establish the "Education-outreach program" - a 14-week life-skill empowerment program to assist individuals experiencing and isolation to begin to recover from the trauma associated with their homelessness. Since its inception, this program model has been adapted at over a dozen sites and has served over 2,000 individuals.

Throughout these many years of programs it has become my growing awareness of the commonality and connection that I have with all people - and of the recognition that, if I consider my life to be a valued child of God, the person before me is just as loved and as valued. With this in mind, our person-centered approach views the small amount of time one might invest in the assisting of another in crisis - whether to help them get off the street into shelter, or help them move from a shelter into their own home, as an almost incalculably good investment. In our efforts, if someone is sincerely striving to help themselves we truly strive to help them in their efforts. And when someone is struggling to find the will to help themselves - we strive to love them until they learn to love themselves again. We are committed to leave no one behind and remarkably, both in our street outreach efforts and our Housing Voucher Fellowship, we have not had to turn down any qualified applicant for our assistance. (This means that some Thursday nights that we "advertise" as between 7 and 9pm, i have gotten home - a 30 minute drive- as late as 12:30am).

3. In recent years, Philoxenia has experienced a dramatic increase in helping those with food insecurity who do not identify as being homeless. How can addressing the affordable housing crisis in New York help fight this related issue?

Clearly funds spent on housing and other necessities are funds unavailable for food. Nearly 50% of New York renter households are now spending over 30% of their income for rent, and half of those are paying more than 50% of their income for rent. In the long term, NYC must build more housing affordable to people earning between 40% and 80% of the area median income (about $35,000 to $70,000 for a family of three). While we must do what we can to help people get enough to eat today, it is imperative that those of us who are concerned about the poor, advocate for public policy solutions to the affordable

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Community Conversations

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housing crisis - and encourage our neighbors and neighborhoods in NYC and beyond to be more welcoming of housing affordable to households of modest means -- and be prepared to welcome those members of our human family as neighbors.

4. 2025 marks the 40th anniversary of you serving as the Interfaith Assembly's Executive Director. As a self-described social entrepreneur, what are your proudest moments working for justice in your community?

Our 1988 200-day City Hall Park vigil, and the substantial press coverage that helped the public to learn about it, i believe began to change the way the public viewed those who have experienced homelessness- from people looking for a hand-out to people looking for a hand up. AND the life-skills program model that grew out of that experience and partnership has helped close to 2,000 formerly homeless and/or formerly incarcerated women and men to reclaim their lives – and beyond those who benefited directly from the life-skills programs, the thousands of volunteers and staff who were part of the life-skills programs and the family and friends of our graduates have been impacted in positive long term ways. (A book, entitled "Sleeping With the Mayor, a True Story" was written about this)

I frequently see and interact with people who graduated from these programs - as many are engaged in working for justice with various community based organizations. Although some of these programs suspended operations as a result of COVID, one, "Coming Home" for people returning home from incarceration, has continued remotely - and now, again, in person, and we are planning to renew another program site this spring of "Face to Face". It is my hope, in partnership with Broadway Community Inc., that these programs will also serve as an orientation and training venue through which we can again establish other program sites with other interested program partners. (A book entitled "Sacred Shelter, 13 Journeys of Homelessness and Healing" includes stories of 13 program graduates and other participants).

Another significant effort that I and the Assembly played an important role in was the "Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing" which, in 2015/2016 secured a pledge from Bill de Blasio and Andrew Cuomo to collectively support the construction of 25,000 units of supportive housing statewide over 15 years. This campaign began in early 2014 when our broad coalition determined that, with only

with only one out of six households in New York state who qualified for supportive housing actually being able to secure it, the state needed to build at least 35,000 units of supportive housing, and so we began to organize.

The coalition was broad and different participants played different roles. With the Assembly focusing on the faith community, we organized a letter to the mayor and the governor with 273 faith leaders of virtually every religion and from every part of the state. We organized a letter writing campaign that generated over 3,000 letters signed by congregants which we delivered to the governor's representative in Albany. We helped organize a rally at the New York Society for Ethical Culture that was attended by over 800 people and included a delegation of 13 Interfaith leaders that addressed the rally.

When our collective efforts finally resulted in the commitment of 10,000 units from the mayor, and 15,000 from the governor, another challenge presented itself - that being that despite the governor budgeting $1 billion for the first 6,000 of his 15,000 promised units, he only released $185 million- leaving the release of the remaining $915 million to be negotiated with the legislature. An arrangement that the supportive housing developers in our coalition told us made the work of securing building sites extremely problematic.

So the final effort of that year's campaign's was our holding a weekly 9am Wednesday vigil in front of the governor's NYC offices for what ended up being 39 weeks- until we recieved his commitment to release all the funds with no further delay!!

Some of the people our voucher fellowship program is now helping to secure housing for are finding their housing in the units produced as a result of our advocacy in 2015/2016.

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Community Conversations *(continued)*

5. What do you feel will be essential to ensuring another 40 years and more for the organization?

Frankly, my efforts have never focused on the longevity of the Interfaith Assembly, though as I near my 75th year, it has become a consideration. My gifts are not in institution building. However, i have begun to have discussions with my dear (and much younger) colleague, Isaac Adlerstein, the ED of Broadway Community inc. about expanding the partnership of our organizations in our life-skills programs and our voucher fellowship work.

Ultimately, in a sense, the legacy of our efforts over these 40 plus years, will be the lives we have touched, and the compassionate person centered and bearing witness justice focused approach that have characterized our work since the inception of the Assembly.

6. What advice do you have for people new to volunteering their time to help our neighbors in need?

I think the first concern that comes up for people is the question of personal safety. In my over 40 years of encounters with people who are hungry and homeless I have not felt threatened once. If you treat people with respect, I think people can sense that you are there to help them. In my experience, people who might pose any danger are those who are frightened and they will give you clear signals that they want you to keep your distance.

Respect and non-judgement is key. Every one we see is probably going through one of the worst periods in their entire life. There was likely a personal trauma or loss that was at least partly related to their homelessness and it's not unlikely that they are sleep deprived and may have had their personal belongings - including their phone and identification stolen more than once. They may also be feeling great shame because of their circumstances.

My deepest belief is that we are all truly one family and beyond that, in a very real sense, we are all really part of one spiritual body.

It is not merely a truism that we are all one family, it is factually true! Evolutionary biologists have determined that every human being on earth can trace our ancestry to "mitochondrial eve" a woman who lived approximately 200,000 years ago in East Africa. Beyond this biological history, the other philisophical /conceptual pillar that informs my work is the concept of scarcity that I see as a falicy. As Ghandi said "there is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed."

And for me this extends to my belief about those we seek to serve. They have resources and gifts but sadly, many have been conditioned to see themselves though others eyes and through the judgements of our dominant culture - and therefore as worth very little. We must bring to their eyes and their hearts our belief that they have unlimited worth and that their gifts are needed by our troubled world.

What We're Reading

- *The New York Times* reported that New York City food banks aren't sure how they will survive the administration's funding cuts, which could also affect the programs they turn to for help. ("'An Existential Threat': Food Banks Brace for Fallout From Trump Cuts")

- As *NPR* reports, the average American household throws away $200 of food each month. How can we get more food onto plates and less into landfills? Their broadcast focused on "...changing the food system, from the farm to your kitchen." ("TED Radio Hour: The Great Food Rescue").

- *Civil Eats* profiles an "ambitious nonprofit restaurant serves healthy, high-quality food to all, regardless of income" in New York City. ("Community Kitchen Brings Food Justice to the Table").

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