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

Philoxenia Times

	Fall 2026	
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Philoxenia's volunteers with our friends at St. George & St. Demetrius Church in April. Details on page 2.

President's Message

As we enter the last few months of 2026 and another holiday season, our team at Philoxenia has been busy finding more ways to help our friends and neighbors facing food and housing insecurity.

We've provided thousands of meals to our neighbors since January through increased program activity and valued partnerships with both longtime collaborators and new relationships.

None of this would be possible without the extraordinary generosity of our friends and donors. Your support is what inspires and enables us to carry out this critical work.

On behalf of our board, thank you for all that you do to support Philoxenia, and we hope to see you at one of our events soon.

Despina



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— Our April 3 Pop-Up Pantry, held at **St. George & St. Demetrios Church**, was an inspiring success.

Together with the church and the **Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity**, we gave out over 170 bags, each containing food for multiple meals, to our East Harlem neighbors in just 45 minutes. We handed out over \$7,400 in donated or purchased food items to be used for the holiday weekend and beyond

(continued on next page)



Scenes from Philoxenia's 2026 events to date.

Philoxenia Continues to Enhance Program Offerings

We've had a full slate of activity during the first eight months of 2026. In addition to increasing our frequency and volume of programs, our team has been fortunate to branch out to help the widening range of community segments impacted by food insecurity.

— Our first Pop-Up Pantry of 2026, held on January 20, was a terrific success thanks to our new partnership with the **Jewish Association Servicing the Aging (JASA)**, which honors older New Yorkers as vital members of society, providing services that support aging with purpose and partnering to build strong communities. Our friend and longtime Philoxenia volunteer, **Bernadette DeCelle**, facilitated the event.

Our senior friends and neighbors are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, and we were deeply grateful to Bernadette and the JASA team for working with us to help our community.



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– On May 4 we once again worked with students from **IS 77** and the **Greater Ridgewood Youth Council**, in collaboration with **The Loukoumi Make a Difference Foundation**, for our annual Sandwiches & Socks event. We made 150+ sandwiches and packed bags with **Bombas** socks, snacks, water and toiletries to distribute at the **River Fund** food pantry – an impressive organization that gives free groceries to more than 2,000 families every week. The need is great, and we are so happy to help in any way that we can.

– We fed so many people at our Pop Up Pantry on June 5 at **Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates (LEFSA)**! 175 bags packed full of groceries – enough for a week of meals – were distributed in 25 minutes to our friends in Harlem. Thank you to the **BakerHostetler** NY office summer associates and attorneys, **Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, NYC Philoptochos** for being our produce sponsor, **Silvia Coulter** for beautiful hand-knit hats, our amazing volunteers, and everyone from **LEFSA** who made it all run so smoothly.



— Great day on June 12 feeding our neighbors at the **United Community Center of Westchester (UCCW)**. We gave away 144 bags of groceries – providing hundreds of meals. Thank you, **Feeding Westchester**, for providing the food, **Bombas** for the best socks, and to the students at **Anne Hutchinson School** who participated in the **Loukoumi Make a Difference Foundation** program, and **Nick Katsoris**, in partnership with Philoxenia. The kids were delighted to collect and donate Barilla pasta to add to the bags.

– On August 28 we worked with the amazing staff and volunteers of **Life Experience and Faith Sharing (LEFSA)** in East Harlem to help our neighbors in need.

We handed out over 220 bags of fresh and shelf-stable food — each containing over a week's worth of meals — to families and individuals outside of LEFSA's offices. We also provided supplies such as dental kits and similar toiletries.

Deepest thanks to our donors and volunteers for making this another successful day for Philoxenia.



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Community Conversations: James Addison, Operations Manager, LEFSA



Since our founding, Philoxenia and its team have been extraordinarily fortunate to partner with organizations and individuals who share our mission to help feed and clothe our neighbors who are homeless or in need of assistance. One of our greatest allies has been the amazing staff of **Life Experience and Faith Sharing (LEFSA)** in East Harlem.

LEFSA is a non-profit, interdenominational empowerment ministry sponsored by the **Sisters of Charity of New York**. It serves people who are homeless, living in city-sponsored shelters and on the streets of New York City. For the last several years, LEFSA has been incredibly generous to Philoxenia, often donating its space for our Pop-Up Pantries, working alongside us to hand out food and supplies, and offering their insights into how we can together help our fellow New Yorkers.

Among LEFSA's leaders is our friend, **James Addison**. He has been with LEFSA for over 33 years in a variety of roles, including as Operations Manager. James and his LEFSA colleagues offer a range of services, including hosting community gatherings within city-sponsored shelters, where volunteer participants facilitate a forum where people who are homeless come together to share life and faith experiences, share about the problems related to homelessness, and work within a supportive faith community towards emerging from their situation.

James knows what every step of their journeys are like; he walked into a meeting in the early 1990s in Midtown after years of struggling with substance abuse, homelessness and family trauma. As he shared with *The New York Times* in a 2001 profile, James learned one day from his father that he had just become a grandfather. The revelation caused him to reflect on his life and, after attending his first LEFSA meeting, he worked closely with a mentor provided by the organization to, in his words, “work on short-term goals and long term goals. My goals were simple: get a recovery, get an apartment, get a job.”

However simple the goals sounded, James put in tireless years of work to achieve them. He overcame his substance addictions, became a member of the LEFSA team and reconnected with his family. Now an ordained minister and a passionate advocate for ending homelessness, James shared his perspectives with us for this edition of Community Conversations.

You've seen every facet of what an organization like LEFSA and its employees and volunteers can do to help New Yorkers. What's the biggest takeaway for you, as both a former program participant and leader for over three decades?

The LEFSA team is special. We're here together and we're helping each other to get better. When you can get a group of homeless people like that who have come up from the ashes and can show this kind of love to one another, it's powerful. For me personally, LEFSA gave me my life back. But it didn't just give me my life back, it gave me my family's life back, too. And not only did my family get better, but my community got a little better.

What is it about community engagement through programs like LEFSA's that you believe is key to helping people take that first step in their journey, as you did over 30 years ago?

We make sure everyone has a chance to be heard. When I attended my first meeting, I found it fascinating that people in the shelter I never heard talk before — people who I thought couldn't even speak — were sharing their experiences. We all felt equal; the Sisters who facilitated the meeting made us feel like we were important. There is something very, very powerful about an organization giving people a forum where they can reconnect with their dignity.



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Community Conversations:

James Addison (*continued*)

What advice would you have for someone who wants to volunteer, whether directly for LEFSA or in partnership with an organization like Philoxenia, but isn't sure of how to get started?

A lot of my guidance would derive from LEFSA's mission. Our employees and volunteers are responding to our call to live as sisters and brothers with one another as responsible members of a global community. We want to make a discernible commitment to work for liberation with people who are oppressed; and to stand in solidarity with people striving to create a more just society. If any of this resonates with someone, it doesn't matter how large or how small their donation of time is — anything you can do will mean a great deal to those in your community who need help.

What We're Reading

As more people turn to food pantries amid rising grocery costs and benefits cuts, The New York Times reports that social service organizations are exploring new ways to meet their needs. ("It Looks Like Trader Joe's. But the Food Is Free").

As reported by several news outlets, the CEOs of the 10 major food banks in New York State, along with U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, came together at Feeding Westchester in Elmsford to issue a warning about cuts to SNAP benefit funding. Starting on Oct. 1, the federal government will go from covering 50% of the administrative costs for SNAP benefits to just 25%. ("We're really going to struggle," News 12 The Bronx)

City Limits recently published an essay, "NYC's Food Lifelines: Building a System That Can Withstand Crisis," that posited the city likely has plenty of food to help its vulnerable populations. However, the issues that could expose New York in a time of crisis include a lack of clear communication between city agencies and community organizations, an over-reliance on a handful of food centers, and a lack of transportation infrastructure to get fresh food to different areas of the city quickly and efficiently.

Join Us for Thanksgiving!

Football, the NYC Marathon, painted leaves underfoot. Thanksgiving must be right around the corner. For many, this holiday includes family, food and a great morning parade. It's a truly joyful celebration - as long as that certain relative doesn't bring up forbidden topics at the table!

For the past nine years, Philoxenia - a Greek word for "friend to the stranger" - has helped food-insecure families in Harlem to enjoy this day. Aided by a dedicated army of volunteers, we give away bags filled with a wide variety of ingredients including stuffing mix, cranberries, fresh greens and a certificate for a turkey or pork roast from the local Food Town.

Think that inflation has hit your food budget this year? Trying filling 200 bags! At about \$70 per bag, our volunteers need \$14,000 to host this meal.

Last year, as people waited patiently in a long line that formed on East 123rd Street, recipients described favorite holiday recipes. For some it's traditional turkey. For others it's Dominican pernil or Caribbean spices. But one vital ingredient is common to all - You.

You're the vital ingredient that completes the recipe for community care. Your purchase of a complete bag for \$70 or a turkey for \$25 or any other amount that gives you joy will be gratefully received.

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