

## Thanksgiving Day: Through the Eyes of Food Program Manager

Posted At : December 8, 2011 6:11 PM | Posted By : Food Bank Staff

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*Just before Thanksgiving, you heard from Cassandra Agredo, Director of Food Bank network member Xavier Mission, on Bank on It about the whirlwind of activity leading up to Thanksgiving day, when approximately New Yorkers would enjoy a Thanksgiving meal thanks to their efforts*

Thanksgiving at Xavier Mission is my favorite time of the year. It's when the best of humanity is revealed, when the boundaries that divide us seem to disappear for awhile.

What humbles me the most about the holiday is the gratitude I experience from so many people. It begins when our food pantry guests arrive to pick up their Thanksgiving food baskets. Many of them hug me, clasp my hands, and bless me and my family. Some are so overwhelmed by the food they are receiving and the ability to provide their families with a home-cooked holiday meal that they become tearful in their thanks.

One amazing moment happened when an elderly guest greeted one of my volunteers with effusions of gratitude and kept telling the volunteer how much she wished she could do something for him. All she had with her was a piece of gum and she pressed it into his hand, eager to show her thanks and return the kindness.

The gratitude continued to flow on Thanksgiving Day, when a gentleman joining us for Thanksgiving dinner at our community meal program slipped a napkin in my pocket. "Oh this rainbow coalition would fit into any exhibit of New York!" the napkin exclaimed. "Thanksgiving [at Xavier] was truly lovely and the greatest of performances!"

Gratitude emanated from our volunteers as well. One 78-year old woman had been signed up to receive a homebound meal. She called several days before the holiday to decline the delivery and requested instead that she be allowed to volunteer. She sat at the door and welcomed each guest into the hall with a smile, then thanked me over and over at the end of the day for allowing her to be a part of the festivities.

After being awash in the thanks and gratitude of so many this Thanksgiving, I find myself to be the most grateful of all. I'm grateful for the many blessings in my life, for the opportunity to work in a fulfilling job, and for the amazing people I meet every day—guests, volunteers, colleagues, advocates—who teach me so much about life, about justice and about love.