

LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - Nearly 900 people found a seat at the table Thursday as People's City Mission (PCM) hosted its annual Thanksgiving Day meal, offering a restaurant-style dining experience to anyone in need of a holiday meal.

Guests entered the cafeteria at PCM's temporary housing facility on Q Street and were handed paper menus at their seats, where they could circle the food and drink items they wanted. Volunteers then took orders and delivered meals directly to each table.

The event made possible by local donations and dozens of volunteers, is one of the mission's largest traditions. PCM raises about \$20 million a year from public donations, with only about \$5 million coming from grants. As Lincoln's only homeless shelter, the organization houses up to 350 people each night through its emergency shelter and transitional housing program.

Pastor Tom Barber, who leads the mission, said Thanksgiving holds special significance for many of the guests who attend.

"There are a lot of people who have broken pasts," Barber said. "We just do what we can to encourage them and help them feel better. A day like today is critical because they get to celebrate Thanksgiving with the rest of the community."

He added that days like this play an important role in helping guests find motivation to move forward.

"When you have a day like today and days that are really positive, it helps make people positive and that makes them more likely to want to get whatever they need to get back on their feet," Barber said.

The Kasaty family has volunteered on Thanksgiving for six years, helping take orders, serve meals and guide guests through the dining process.

"It's fun watching our kids too, they have been doing it for a long time, but they start every year a little nervous and by the end they don't need us at all and they are just serving," Brenda Kasaty said.

Her daughter, Mayah, said one of her favorite parts is watching guests realize they won't have to stand in line.

"Some of them will try to go up in the line, then them realizing that they get to sit down and be served," said Mayah Kasaty.

For many attending, this year's meal was about more than food.

“We haven’t had a Thanksgiving in about two years. So this means a lot to me and the family,” one guest said.

This guest mentioned her family and her have been homeless for three years prior to coming to PCM, living out of hotels or wherever they could find shelter.

“I’m thankful we have a roof over our heads,” she said. “Being here is probably the best thing for us. So I am thankful for this place.”

Barber said gratitude is what connects everyone at the mission.

“Hopefully you are thankful for something even if you’re not having a good day or if things are not going right,” Barber said. “I have people here who have things that are really going wrong with, and they are being grateful.”

People’s City Mission began in 1907 and continues to offer emergency shelter, transitional housing and essential services to Lincoln residents in need. The organization also operates the Help Center and a free dental clinic, supported largely through donations and volunteer service.

“I encourage everyone [listening] to be grateful, because we all got something,” Barber said.