

words

Words to Live By

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by Karen Kelly Kiefer

The flour was everywhere. Little hands and big spirits were busy drawing hearts into flour on the countertop, while the bread waited to be made. That memory calls out to me, now, years later; realizing that image in the flour was a sign, our first spiritual marker on a bread journey led by the glory of God.

It was the late 1990s and we had three of our four daughters in our earthly company. One question consumed my hectic days, “How can I begin to thank Him for His gifts?” That question led me back to my childhood, to my mother and her Irish bread. Like a baked prayer, my mother’s bread spoke to me, telling me I was safe, cared for, loved.

It would be her bread that would answer my question. We would become the messengers, the bakers of her bread so the bread could speak to others and offer hope, inspiration, and gratitude.

So when the girls were big enough to stir batter, we began making my mother’s Irish bread. We baked dozens of loaves, dressing them with artwork and notes. Loading up our wheelbarrow, we traveled around the neighborhood, leaving the bread gifts on doorsteps.

We thought that hearing gratitude in voices of neighbors was the reason we continued on with our bread journey. What we didn’t realize was that it was the faint whispers of St. Ignatius, leading us, telling us to “Go forth and set the world afire.”

Called by grace, we began baking more, visiting nursing homes and shelters and spreading more bread. Bread became our hobby, our expression, our gift, our mission, our ministry.

When September 11 gripped our country, the bread called us back into the kitchens. The bread whispers traveled quickly. The message was clear—gather your family and friends. Find a favorite recipe and make that bread. While the bread is baking, take time to



have conversations about our world. Define heroes and talk about the needs in the community, because this conversation will lead everyone to their bread beneficiaries.

Breads were baked, wrapped like gifts, and arrived in different shapes, sizes, and flavors. The breads were spread back into the community to our heroes: police, firefighters and veterans, and delivered to food pantries, senior centers, and shelters. *Spread the Bread* was officially born.

Spread the Bread is now an international grassroots organization, using the gifting of bread to unite communities, teach community philanthropy, empower our youth, thank heroes, help the needy while defining tradition and culture.

Flour is still everywhere in our kitchen, but we see clearly His signature in the white powder. We have been touched by God through this bread ministry and how fitting, knowing that bread is the universal symbol of peace and fellowship and the body of Christ.

Karen Kelly Kiefer credits many of the Jesuits at Boston College, her alma mater, for their profound inspiration and influence toward the formation of her lay bread vocation, Spread the Bread.



Visit www.spreadthebread.org to learn more.