

St. Luke's
Lutheran Church
—West 46th Street,

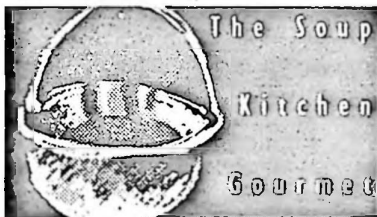
(Tuesdays & Thursdays 3:00 p.m.)

Rating: ♪ ♪ ♪ ½

In the best of all worlds I suppose there would be no need for soup kitchens. But if they must be, perhaps the best place for one to be located is on Restaurant Row. Every Tuesday and Thursday a sandwich-board sign (appropriately) appears by the side entrance of St Luke's Church—just off Eighth Avenue on 46th Street—and proclaims SOUP KITCHEN TODAY anyone hungry welcome.

This friendly, unconditional invite aptly reflects the manner our host, Father Hansen Pastor of St. Luke's, as he greets the hundred or so street folks who stream through the church's doors each seating.

The service, cafeteria-style by number (issued at entrance) is cordial and efficient. Food and beverages are spread out on four tables at three stations; entree's, soups, coffee and an amusing eau blanc (water). Among the entrees are pastas dishes; three bean, zucchini, and other vegetable salads; sliced ham, turkey and various sandwich



makings along with a healthy selection of bagels rolls sodabreads and so forth. All of this is culled from the surpluses of eating establishments along The Row and vary with the reputation (and inspiration) of each.

I find the pastas to be consistently tasty and filling while I've never been particularly partial to 'hard' salads, preferring the subtler crunch of leafy tosses, inelegantly drenched in creamy dressing. Ham is always a tangy delight, and that served here never seems to suffer from over saltiness, (though the over-processed turkey often leaves me yearning for a pinch or two of the stuff).

Ever hear of M&M soup? Well this place has it. Before your stomach turns at the thought of candied chocolates bobbing in a sea of chicken broth I should explain that the M&M stands for Macaroni and Minestrone and it's really quite refreshing.

This brings us to St. Luke's real claim to fame which is in creative and sometimes inspired combinations of donated soups into single, robust concoctions hearty enough at times to stand in for stew. It's ladled from huge steaming pots so the inside hint here is to arrive a little on the late

side so that more of the goodies lingering at the bottom will end up in your bowl.

By the way, there's a baby grand style piano by the door and often some benevolent soul willing to provide a little entertainment of the ivory music kind, which, depending on the level of artistry, provides high atmosphere or low comedy.

All and all this 'soup' consistently presents a handsome spread, week after week, and it keeps the irrepressible Father Hansen busily working the solicitation circuit. Leading him to remark to his hungry hordes one day, "I'm the biggest beggar in this room."

So if you are 'anyone hungry' and like to eat in a conducive, unhurried, and non-patronizing environment, walk in and taste the coffee! (On second thought, unless you like it well done, skip the coffee. If you really need a caffeine 'fix' it would be more pleasant chewing coffee grinds than braving their potent brew.)

Bon appetit! ■

(Condensed from *Cooking on the Edge*, Sept/Oct issue.)

by Lee Stringer