

The Parish of St. Mark Communion Hosts

By Kim Brooksby

One unique guild at The Parish of St. Mark in Portland, Oregon, is St. Martha's Guild, which is responsible for baking, cutting, wrapping, and mailing thousands of communion hosts every month. The Guild originated early in the twentieth century. At that time, the nuns who once served at St. Mark lovingly produced the hosts. Over the years, the work of St. Martha's Guild was taken over by parishioners, and the hosts have been shipped to every region in the country – the East Coast, the South, the Midwest, the Southwest, throughout the West, and up and down West Coast. It has been said time and time again that St. Martha's Guild "makes the best hosts in Christendom!" The difference between St. Mark's hosts and others available for purchase seems to lie in the texture of the hosts. Those produced by St. Martha's Guild are very thin and literally melt in one's mouth.

The guild produces both people's and priest's hosts that are baked on irons. The irons are unique antiques, which often operate on "a wing and a prayer." Thankfully, St. Mark's



rector is able to keep them in excellent working order.

The baking process resembles making waffles. A thin layer of batter is ladled onto the iron, producing a sheet of thirty-seven people's hosts or two priest's hosts and twenty-six people's hosts.

A typical baking session of two batches produces approximately 3,500 hosts. After baking, the hosts are allowed to sit for twenty-four hours. Each individual host is then cut or stamped out by hand.



Pat Garvey cutting host. (All photos by Bruce Wilcox)

Once the hosts have been cut, they are carefully wrapped in groups of fifty people's hosts and twenty-five priest's hosts. Lastly, the hosts are mailed out.

St. Martha's Guild currently has twelve parishioners working in the bread room on a weekly or bi-weekly basis and produces approximately 16,000 hosts each month.

If your parish would like information about purchasing communion hosts from St. Martha's Guild, please contact the Rector, Father Lillegard, by phone (503-223-2383) or by e-mail (stmark@stmarkportland.org). Orders can be shipped monthly, quarterly, yearly, or on an "as needed" basis; and the Guild would be happy to send out a small quantity of both people's and priest's hosts for your clergy, vestry or altar guild to sample.