

# Recipe for Success Is On the Menu For Parish

## With Each Meal, These Rectory Cooks Serve Up Love and Faith to Maspeth Church

by Paula Katinas, Senior Reporter

**M**ASPETH—Three-star Michelin restaurants aren't the only places offering diners a memorable culinary experience. Some of the tastiest meals in Queens are served up in a most unlikely place: Transfiguration-St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish in Maspeth.

That's where two talented cooks lovingly prepare meals for a special clientele — the clergy who live in the rectory, and religious brothers residing in a former convent next door.

Maria Guadagno is the rectory cook, preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner for Magr. Joseph Calise and the priests of the parish. Michael Edmonds cooks in the convent next door, serving the Brothers of the Sacred Heart.

While the two hail from very different professional backgrounds — Edmonds spent 40 years as a professional chef and Guadagno is a former teacher's aide — they have important things in common: a love of cooking, along with a deep Catholic faith.

"It brings me joy to cook for the priests," Guadagno said on a recent afternoon as she stood in the rectory kitchen.

### Maria's Recipes

#### LASAGNA

- 1 box of Lasagna Noodles
- 2 jars of Rao Tomato Sauce
- 1 large tub of ricotta
- 2 lbs. ground beef
- 2 packets of mozzarella cheese
- 2 eggs

- 1- Mix ground beef with 2 eggs
- 2- Brown meat in a saucepan
- 3- Boil lasagna noodles in a pot of water according to directions on box
- 4- Heat tomato sauce in a saucepan
- 5- When noodles are cooked, let them cool for a few minutes
- 6- Grease a 9-by-13 inch baking pan with non-stick cooking spray
- 7- Coat the bottom of a baking dish with a thin layer of tomato sauce
- 8- Place a layer of noodles on top of the tomato sauce, then a layer of ground beef, followed by another layer of noodles
- 9- Place a layer of ricotta and mozzarella
- 10- Continue layering: with noodles, meat, sauce and cheeses in that order
- 11- Top layer should be noodles
- 12- Coat the top layer with mozzarella cheese
- 13- Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes

#### SWEET POTATO MUFFINS WITH

#### CINNAMON SUGAR TOPPING (From the Spruce Eats)

For the muffins:

- 1 and ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 ½ cups pureed sweet potato, either from a can or freshly cooked sweet potatoes
- 2 ¼ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup toffee bits
- 2 large eggs
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup light brown sugar, packed
- ½ cup evaporated milk
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

- 1- Heat oven to 375 degrees
- 2- Butter and spray the wells of a 12-cup muffin tin with cooking spray
- 3- In a medium bowl, combine flour, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon, nutmeg, baking powder, and salt. Stir or whisk to blend thoroughly, then set aside
- 4- In a large mixing bowl, whisk the eggs. Whisk in the ¼ cup of granulated sugar and brown sugar, evaporated milk, vegetable oil and vanilla extract
- 5- Add the sweet potato puree and whisk until well blended
- 6- Using a spoon, stir the flour mixture into the sweet potato batter just until the dry mixture is moistened. The batter will be a bit lumpy
- 7- Fold in the pecans and toffee bits
- 8- Fill muffin tins until they're nearly full

#### Make the topping

- 1- In a small bowl, combine the 2 tablespoons of granulated sugar and ½ teaspoon of cinnamon
- 2- Sprinkle ½ teaspoon of the sugar, cinnamon mixture over top of each muffin
- 3- Bake muffins for 22-26 minutes





en keeping an eye on the oven where she was baking lasagna. "This kitchen is like my little sanctuary. It gives me peace of mind to come here."

Edmonds expressed a similar sense of joy. "This is the fun part of my faith because this gives me the opportunity to give back," he said as he stirred zucchini in a frying pan.

Edmonds, a parishioner of St. Stanislaus Church, has an extensive professional history. He is a trained chef, having graduated from the Culinary Institute of America and Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts.

He once owned his own restaurant, then became a private chef for the Huntington Hartford family (founders of the A&P supermarket chain), who hosted lavish dinner parties for such guests as Princess Margaret of Great Britain.

He also served his delicious dishes to celebrities Chris Rock, Elaine Stritch and Mariska Hargitay. "Phoebe Cates used to call me up and ask me for my Sangria recipe," he recalled.

While he has happy memories, Edmonds said he wouldn't trade his current life for anything. "I had a fabulous life before. But this is Part Two of that fabulous life to me because I get such pleasure," he said, add-

ing that he tries to make every meal special. "It's very easy to take a chicken breast and make it into something spectacular."

Part of the reason he loves his job are the Brothers he serves. "They live a very simple life and are very grateful for everything," he said.

On the menu that day was salmon with white wine sauce with a side dish of sauteed zucchini.

Edmonds' latest job came about gradually. A few years ago, Msgr. Calise asked him to cook a meal for then-Bishop of Brooklyn Nicholas DiMarzio, who was visiting the parish. That led to the veteran chef preparing other dinners on a volunteer basis, then ultimately becoming the rectory cook. Three years ago, he started cooking for the brothers next door.

When asked why he loves being a chef, his answer is simple. "If you ask a musician about this, they'll say that music is their expression. Well, food is my expression be-

cause, to me, food is love. It comes from my heart and it's my way of, 'Here, this is for you,'" he explained.

Guadagno, who lives in Williamsburg and is a parishioner of St. Francis of Paula-Divine Mercy Parish, worked as a teacher's assistant in a public school for 23 years before taking the cooking position at Transfiguration-St. Stanislaus Koska, which she's held since 2019. She was referred for the job by a friend who knew that Msgr. Calise was looking for a rectory cook.

Guadagno was born in Foggia, Italy and came to the U.S. in 1973 at the age of 9. Cooking talent runs in the family; she grew up watching her mother prepare meals in the kitchen. "I would sit on a stool and just watch her work," she remembers. "I have such wonderful memories of that."

One of the lessons her mother taught her was that homemade is best. "We used to make our own tomato sauce. We would buy baskets of tomatoes, Guadagno said.

"We would make the sauce and put it into jars. We always had enough sauce to last the whole winter," she recalled.

When The Tablet visited her on Thursday, Nov. 17, she was making lasagna, meatballs and brussels sprouts with bacon.

She always keeps in mind the tastes of the individual priests as well as their dietary needs. "I know if a priest is allergic to fish," she explained. That doesn't mean she avoids preparing fish, but she will carefully label a fish dish by putting a note on top so that the priest will know whether or not to eat it.

Like any good cook, Guadagno varies her menu. "I like to try new dishes. Today, I found a recipe for Baked Glazed Apple Fritters on the Internet that I'm going to try for dessert," she said.

The priests appreciate her culinary flair. "She makes every dish her own," said Father Joseph Wilson, parochial vicar for the parish. "She does a good job. And I love her lasagna!"



**Michael's Recipes**

**BANANAS FLAMBÉ**

- 1 stick butter
- 2 cups light brown sugar
- One small dash cinnamon
- 3 cups dark rum
- 4-6 sliced bananas

- 1- Melt butter
- 2- Add brown sugar, caramelize
- 3- Sprinkle cinnamon
- 4- Add banana
- 5- Pull pan away from flame
- 6- Add rum
- 7- Return to flame, flambé
- 8- Shake pan
- 9- Pour over scooped vanilla ice cream

**SALMON WITH WHITE WINE SAUCE**

- Salmon cut 6 oz.
- 1 lemon squeezed
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1 Tablespoon capers
- Chopped scallions
- Chopped parsley
- A crumb of chicken bouillon cube
- 1/4 cup water

- 1- Sear salmon in a pan that can go in the oven. Turn over when one side is done
- 2- Place in oven 450° 8-10 min
- 3- Remove, place aside
- 4- Drain oil, place scallions, parsley, capers; sauté, add remaining ingredients, let simmer
- 5- Add 2 tablespoons of butter to sauce; shut off flame, let melt
- 6- Pour over fish
- 7- Garnish with lemon