

## A LONG HISTORY OF FEEDING THE HUNGRY . . .

For close to 50 years St. Leo's parish has made food available to those struggling to make ends meet in the North Fairmount and surrounding communities. Once a thriving neighborhood with its own Kroger's, bakery, neighborhood shops and a bank, North Fairmount has been a "food desert" for many years with little access to healthy affordable food.



To address this need in the late 1970's neighborhood residents in collaboration with the late Lois Broerman, St. Leo's pastoral minister at the time, and the North Fairmount Community Council started a food co-op and thrift shop at 1828 Baltimore Avenue. Fresh produce and shelf stable food were sold at 10% above cost. Sale of items at the thrift shop helped defray the cost of food to customers.

The food pantry started in the mid 1980's by volunteers from the parish St. Vincent de Paul Society and later was headed by parishioner Henry Robison, also known as the "St. Joseph" of the parish for his ability to repair just about anything. Shirley Cade began volunteering at the pantry as a way of giving back to the community since her parents had benefitted so much from the North Fairmount Senior Center in their latter years. When Henry retired, Shirley became the food pantry director and served in that post for nearly 20 years. Her dedication to making



sure the pantry got the most food for its money was evidenced when she fell on a slippery floor at the Food Bank breaking her hip. She refused to let the EMT's tend to her until the food was safely loaded in the pantry van. During Shirley's time at the pantry it became an affiliate of the Free Store Food Bank and was able to offer both produce and meat to the growing number of people coming to the pantry. Numbers were up but storage space was tight. The pantry needed a larger location.



The former Kroger building on Carll Street was available but it would take a lot of hard work to get the building in shape to house the pantry—a daunting task which was accomplished through collaboration with Catholic Charities and many generous

people who donated, money, materials, time and labor.

The pantry moved in 2016. The new site is handicapped accessible and much larger which makes it possible to become a choice food pantry giving customers the dignity of choosing what they like depending on family size and food availability. Stephanie Sepate, St. Leo business manager is currently director of the pantry aided by many faithful volunteers, many from our partner parishes Our Lady of Visitation and St. Ignatius. St. Leo's is so grateful for their dedication and service. Without them it would be impossible to provide this important ministry.



### PRAYER FOR ST. LEO FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEERS

Lord Jesus, who multiplied the loaves and fishes and called us to feed the hungry, be with us today as we serve those you send to us. Open our hearts to see the gift of you in each person who comes to the pantry. Open our ears to hear their joys and struggles. Open our mouths to speak words of caring and respect. Give strength to our arms when we are tired, patience to our spirits when lines are long and things are confusing, and joy in our hearts for the privilege of serving you. Today and every day may we glorify you with our lives. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.