

COME AND EAT . . .

Have you ever not known where your next meal was coming from? Did your stomach ever gnaw and growl and your energy sap because there was nothing to eat?

Our seminarian Ben gave me some insight into what this might be like one day when I grimaced in disgust about a very over-ripe banana on the kitchen table. He picked it up and told me that he always weeps when he sees people wasting food. "I remembered how I cried as a child when there was no food," he said. In the area of Kenya where his family lives there is often only enough food for one meal a day. He said that once children were about age 12 they had to forage on their own and work for food. That's something that many of us might find hard to imagine. Yet there are many people not far from St. Leo's who may have something to eat today but are food insecure—are not sure where they will get food for the rest of the week or month.

St. Leo's food pantry is a true blessing for them. As a choice pantry, it offers them an opportunity to choose food their families like to eat based on family size and food availability. The goal is to provide two weeks' worth of food, including shelf-stable items, meat, dairy, bread, and produce. An army of volunteers—many from our partner parishes Our Lady of Visitation and St. Ignatius—bless us as they work together to pick up food, shelve it, and serve pantry guests with dignity and respect. There's no way we could do it without them.

The way they work together reminds me of a Sesame Street segment of a banquet table laden with food where the guests are having difficulty eating. Some have short arms that can get the food on a fork; the others had very long arms that couldn't use a fork. Nobody was eating until those with short arms gave the fork to those with long arms who fed them. Then the ones with short arms speared the food so the ones with long arms could eat. The punch line at the end was "we call that cooperation."

It seems that God often uses others to help us feed each other. When my daughter Sara got married, the entire St. Leo family came. As one of the African community said, "When there is a wedding everyone comes. There are no invitations." This was a totally foreign concept to me who had given the caterer a specific head count. Somehow, I have no idea of how it happened, everyone was fed and there were leftovers.

It sounds like a story from Scripture coming to life. And maybe it is. After all, it's said that the Bible is the living word of God personal and relevant in every age. So it shouldn't be a surprise that these kinds of events seem to be regular occurrences at St. Leo's. Often when we plan a potluck meal the table looks pretty bare but by the time people line up for food, there are more plates on the table and more than enough food to nourish the assembling crowd.



**"Never worry about numbers.
Help one person at a time,
and always start with
the person nearest you."
— Mother Teresa**

In recent weeks we've been listening to John's gospel about the bread of life. The apostles' meager offerings are multiplied and twelve baskets are filled with leftovers and they are invited to eat the living bread and never hunger and thirst again. When we, like them, bring ourselves with our gifts, hungers and brokenness to the Eucharistic table each week we are fed with that everlasting bread of life and as we become what we eat we find ourselves more willing to be broken and shared with others and are empowered to trust and not be afraid as we step out in faith to risk and support others who are hungering.

The food of the Eucharist is multiplied in our feeding others through the food pantry as well as in other ministries that we and our partners are involved in which promote the common good of all our brothers and sisters. And through God's grace our efforts are multiplied in ways we can't even ask or imagine.

Come then, let us eat, be broken, and shared.

—Anagela Anno

The St. Leo Food Pantry is located in a former grocery store in the center of North Fairmount on a bus line. The food pantry currently occupies about half of the available space in the building. The remaining space includes 5 offices, a board room sized meeting room, and a larger meeting/event space. The St. Leo community hub project will provide space to facilitate collaboration with community groups; opening the space for community meetings and events, and creating a culture of inclusivity and mutuality that will lead to new and deepened relationships. The hub will more intentionally bring together faith and community based organizations to address community stated needs like access to education and job training.