

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Working Together to Feed the Hungry

Living out the corporal works of mercy, including feeding the hungry, is part of our mission statement. And we couldn't do it without the help of our partners. It takes a lot of behind-the-scenes work to pick up, sort, store, and get the abundance of food ready for the some 1400 people each month who access St. Leo's food pantry. And many of these volunteers who have served the pantry for several years come from our partner parishes, especially Our Lady of Visitation and



St. Ignatius. We are also blessed to have other partners—both individuals and churches-- who collect food and personal care items that are needed but can't be bought with food stamps. St. Xavier church downtown often collects food items for the pantry. Geri Tengler of St. Ignatius works with Christmas in July at that parish which helps collect items to restock pantry shelves in the summer. The pantry also has benefitted from food donations from St. Xavier and LaSalle high school. TriHealth provided a large gift of meat around the holidays.



It takes muscle to collect the food. Each Wednesday pantry director Shirley Cade and Jerry Riesz, Bill Jackson, and Larry Riffe of Our Lady of Visitation take the pantry cargo van to the food bank and to Whole Foods and come back with the van and often another car packed with goodies. Jerry, Bill, and Larry do the hard work of loading the van and then unloading, carrying, and storing the food for distribution. Often it takes several hours of heavy labor

to get the job done but none of them complain. "It's a chance to give back, to help others," they say. Long time volunteer Paul Tengler of St. Ignatius was away when family demands caused him to step back, but is now back with the muscle crew!

Volunteers also pick up food from Kroger's twice a week, and from Remke Markets and Starbucks. Often they come with car-loads of groceries.

Besides muscle, flexible volunteers are needed to greet and serve those who come. Current regular volunteers include Bonnie Riffe of Our Lady of Visitation who has been coming with her husband and St. Joseph Sisters Pat, Janet, and Julie who fill in wherever help is needed. They work with Shirley and the other volunteers to create the atmosphere of welcome, caring, and respect that is a hallmark of the pantry. Volunteers serve as their lives and time permits. In the

past volunteers included parishioners from St. Ignatius, St. Xavier and other parishes. One mom even brought her pre-school son with her teaching him early that helping others is important.

Like so many other things at St. Leo's God seems to have a way of connecting people to make more food available. Bill Kluesener saw Shirley at the Food Bank and thought of her and St. Leo's when he was contacted by Little Caesars who wanted to donate pizzas left over at the end of the day. There was such abundance that he gives pizzas to the Mt. Healthy pantry and to St. Paul's United Church of Christ pantry, as well as to St. Leo's. The Vineyard church gives fresh produce to Lisa Hyde-Hill at the Villages at Roll Hill community center. She shares what residents there don't take with the pantry. Someone connected Shirley with Fresh Thyme and the pantry gets produce and deli items from there two times a week.



Other very important parts of the team are the anonymous donors. When the old cargo van resembled a Fred Flintstone vehicle with cardboard covering the floor boards, an anonymous donor generously gave enough money to buy a new van. Shirley and the volunteers were elated.

There are also people who see peanut butter and tuna on sale and buy large amounts to donate to the pantry to make sure those in need have protein. Others send checks earmarked for the pantry.

Despite all the wonderful donations, the pantry still needs money to buy food from the Foodbank. The largest fund raising event for the pantry is the annual Hunger Walk. Proceeds provide credit at the Freestore/Foodbank to buy food at reduced prices. Information about walking or sponsoring someone to walk for St. Leo's Pantry can be found on our website, www.saint-leo.org, with a link taking you directly to our Hunger Walk Team donation page.



—Angela Anno

Photos by A. Anno & S. Sepate