

Feeding the Hungry...

(In keeping with our commitment to focus on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, this month we will be focusing on the ministry of St. Leo's food pantry.)

Probably St. Leo's most visible ministry in the community is its choice food pantry which has been serving close to 1,300 people each month. Our neighborhood is considered a "food desert" with no near-by large grocery store. Residents who lack transportation have access only to small mom and pop stores where selection is limited and prices often are higher. If one is lucky enough to get to the supermarket, imagine trying to carry a week's worth of groceries on the bus or paying someone to take you to the store when it's convenient for them. That's what our pantry guests face every day. For them, the food pantry is truly a God-send.

Guests are able to choose from a variety of shelf stable and fresh and frozen items, including produce, meat, and dairy products. The amount of each item received is dependent on family size. Often guests receive more than a week's worth of nutritious food which helps when money and food stamps run out. All this is made possible through the commitment and hard work of a generous team of many volunteers who pick up and unload donated food, stock shelves, welcome guests, help them get signed in, serve as escorts while they shop, and help them unload their carts.

Stephanie Sepate, St. Leo business manager serves as director of the pantry, aided by volunteer coordinators Charlene Schwab, on Monday and Leah Brinkman on Wednesday. A volunteer coordinator is still needed on Fridays, as well as an assistant director.

The pantry has undergone many changes since it first began in 1986. Though the location and faces have changed, the commitment to feeding the hungry and the

respect and care for the individual has not. Henry Robison (also known as the parish St. Joseph for all the repairs and projects he did) was the original founder of the food pantry. He followed up on the work of Lois Broerman, director of the North Fairmount Community Center, who worked to provide fresh food at the former store and thrift shop by the turn-around on Baltimore Avenue. Shirley Cade followed Henry and the people seeking help, the amount of food and number of volunteers continued to grow. Her commitment and love of those who came for food marked Shirley's more than 20 years of service in this ministry.

Like many things at St. Leo's the old is becoming new. Until last year the pantry was located in the basement of the rectory. It now is housed in a former Kroger building at the corner of Carll and Baltimore Avenues. With a larger location the pantry has been able to become a choice pantry giving the patrons the dignity of choosing the food for their families.

As a Free Store Foodbank associate St. Leo Food Pantry serves persons in parts of the 45225, 45214, and 45211 zip codes. Guests are asked to bring a photo ID, social security cards for all members of the family and a bill at the current address.

While food from the Free Store is often inexpensive and sometimes there are items on the "free" line, it does cost money to get food there. The biggest fund raiser of the year is the annual Hunger Walk on Memorial Day. Money from the walk is put on our account at the Free Store and hopefully lasts throughout the coming year.

(If you would like to volunteer at the food pantry, please contact Casey Betz at 513-921-1044 ext. 30)



Did You Know?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly called Food Stamps) does not cover personal care items like toothpaste, deodorant and toilet paper or cleaning products like detergent, household and bath soaps. Diapers are also not covered. Thus there is a constant demand for these items at the food pantry. We are always grateful to receive them.

Grow a Row...

People living in food deserts often don't have access to fresh produce. The food pantry offers some fruits and vegetables donated by local stores, but it could always use more. If you are growing a garden this summer, consider planting an extra row to give to the food pantry. Our guests would be most grateful.

Food Assistance Accountability

The average food stamp (SNAP) benefit is about \$1.50 per person per meal.

In order to partake in the Food Assistance Program (SNAP), participants must either be employed or provide community service hours. There are some exemptions but many think folks get something for nothing when, in fact, they must volunteer the number of hours they would receive in food assistance divided by minimum wage. For example, to receive \$157, a person must volunteer 20 hours a month to get food for the mselves and their family (20 hours x \$7.85).

St. Leo provides an outlet for the recipients to perform their service hours. Of course, it depends what services they're able to provide and what tasks we have. Some have helped with our Newsletter mailings, washed down kitchen cabinets and pantry stairs, swept and mopped Centennial Hall, and moved items back and forth. We are grateful for these small opportunities provided for us all to help each other!



The Hunger Walk is St. Leo Food Pantry's ONLY fundraiser of the year . . . consequently, **VERY** important to our continued operation. Although all checks are made payable to FreeStore Foodbank, **ALL** money (even shirt money) designated for St. Leo Food Pantry goes to our account. This is our "money in the bank." When we make purchases at FSFB it is deducted from our account. Our goal this year is to have enough money at the FSFB to last us until the 2018 Hunger Walk! Wouldn't that be wonderful? With your help we can do it! The more the merrier! Ask your friends and family to join you at the walk. Can't run or walk? You can still participate. Join us "in spirit" by making a donation on our behalf.