

St. Luke's Celebrates 1st Year of our Neighbor-to-Neighbor Food Pantry!

As we complete our first year of St. Luke's Neighbor-to-Neighbor Food Pantry, it provides an opportunity to reflect on our productive year. After a very humble beginning of serving 300 pounds of food on opening night [July 2019](#), we have grown to serving, on average, 2000 pounds each opening to 5 times as many clients.

In the tradition of St Luke's hospitality, a personal shopper approach was used initially, including a carry out service. Each client family was met with a warm welcome, and accompanied by a volunteer as they filled their bags. Using shopping carts, another volunteer, wheeled their bagged items to the parking lot. Using paper bags initially, we switched to more durable plastic bags, thanks to the generosity of Menards, HyVee, and Farm Fleet.

As it did to the entire nation, the COVID-19 pandemic created a new norm for our pantry. Using a model suggested by the North East Iowa Food Bank, workers donned masks and gloves, maintained a social distance, and our model of service changed. Clients remained in their car in the parking lot while food was transported from the basement and placed in their car. In short, client self service in the under Croft pantry, changed to volunteer delivery in the parking lot. The volunteer workload increased greatly.

As usual food is picked up with volunteer trucks at the food bank. After shelving at St. Luke's, food is then repackaged to create meals for a family. About 40 pounds of food are put in a durable tub like tote. Then apples, oranges, milk, eggs, bread, and fresh vegetables are carried from the basement to the parking lot for distribution to our neighbors. As a result, volunteer commitment time almost doubled.

The Northeast Iowa Community Foundation provided a solution to this labor intense process. A grant provided funds for another freezer. That enabled us to greatly centralize our frozen food storage; prior to that we were using every freezer space in the building. Sturdy metal shelves were purchased providing more vertical and useable storage space for food, and more space for workers. In addition, grant monies were used to replace boxes, used to carry food to the parking lot, with sturdy totes. New four-wheel convertible carts were purchased to facilitate unloading trucks, and moving food to the parking lot.

Continuous financial and material contributions from parish and community members have been generous, allowing the purchased of items the Food bank doesn't provide such as soap, toilet paper and personal hygiene items.

In true St Luke's spirit of serendipity, clients are able to select items from the "Fun Cart", which has one of kind items that have been donated. These Items include Pringle's, diaper, hand sanitizers, sardines etc. Also, children and adults are offered new or gently read books as they drive through our parking lot. When available, hand made masks are provided.

Volunteer service at our Neighbor-to-Neighbor food Pantry has attracted community members as well. Retired professionals, neighbors of church members, friends and relatives of church members have also joined us many times, lightening workload.

Although our learning curve has been steep, we have proven to be resourceful, creative, flexible, and nimble as we provide a much-needed service to those who need it most. Who would have thought such hard work would be this rewarding, and fun!