

Not Just Feeding a Community, but Being the Community- St. John, Jersey City

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“This is a young and new food pantry, but it’s already doing so much good,” said Pearl, a new recruit to the food pantry at St. John Lutheran Church in Jersey City. And it’s not hard to see how right she is. The waiting area to talk with a volunteer, deal with paperwork, and receive food is crowded, showing the need in this community. Many people bring carts to help them transport the food, so the entryway to the church is packed. But what makes this pantry amazing is that all this good is done by this congregation, neighborhood, and city working together.

Open since November 2013, this pantry was spearheaded by Debra Goidel, a member of St. John who lived in the neighborhood. With a grant from the congregation as seed money, Debra began reaching out to community partners. Goya Foods, a company relocating to Jersey City, donated a large number of canned goods, especially beans. Donations from community partners, neighbors, congregation members, as well as many others make for a great amount of folks. The bags overflow with pasta, sauce, vegetables, cereal, and all the other staples. The other fun thing is the “food of the month,” which asks for special items like potatoes, carrots, and oranges. Special items like toiletries and baby items are also available, as well as information about other events. But even more wonderful are the people who have gathered together to make this work.

Ms. Goidel has also worked to create a unique volunteer base, and is quick to invite others to be a part of this food pantry. After reaching out to the neighborhood civic association, several came out to help, joining volunteers from St. John. Members of the Beta Phi chapter at Hudson Community College began coming out to get community service hours, and then ended up sticking around. The local women’s biker club joined in, and help out with translating and walking through the process. Even those who can’t be physically present help out: shut-ins knit prayer cloths that are handed out with the bags of food. “This is place for everyone to jump in and be a part,” says Rev. Mona Fitch-Elliott, pastor of St. John. Jose, a new volunteer at the food pantry, had just moved Jersey City after an internship at the White House in Washington D.C. When looked for a place to get connected to his community again, he was pointed to John’s and their food pantry, and is loving this opportunity to join in this ministry.



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And it’s being noticed by others as well. Mayor Steven Fulop, who has family members who attended St. John’s in the past, has come several times, and even attended their Spring Fever Comedy and Music Review charity event, which raised money for the pantry. He even tweeted: (St. John’s Food Pantry) is helping our city stamp out hunger.

Being representative of the diverse neighborhood around them and in lifting up the generous and interdependent relationships that exist in our congregations and neighborhoods has helped the food pantry to show God’s work in the world. By being a community together, the people of God are fed and are brought together to share life and love.

If you are interested in helping out, feel free to contact St. John Lutheran Church at www.stjohnsjerseycity.net. In addition, keep up to date by pressing ‘Like’ on the St. John’s Food Pantry Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Handson4hunger>). The pantry is always looking for food, money or volunteer time.