

Crossroads Food Pantry – Reflection on ‘Food’ for 3-year Anniversary

“Feed my sheep”

If you read Pastor Eric’s message in Friday’s Weekly Word E-News, you saw the passage from John that reads: “Simon son of John, do you love me? He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep”.

It’s hard to believe that we’re celebrating 3 years since Crossroads Food Pantry opened its door in May 2012. After the idea was approved by the church council, a handful of volunteers renovated a small room in the education wing with new flooring, a new door, stacks of shelves, and then stocked those shelves with a variety of canned and boxed foods. As opening night approached, some wondered if there would be enough food for all who would come, and others wondered --- what if no one came?

But after the first few weeks of welcoming ~ 20-25 patrons, the word got around and soon the numbers rose to more than 50, and continued to rise --- until, by the end of 2012, Crossroads was serving nearly 100 families in and around Suffield. We joined Foodshare, which enabled us to purchase low cost or free food. Then with generous grants from the Zak Fund and other local charitable organizations, we were able to purchase freezers, a refrigerator and other supplies and equipment so that we could store large quantities of meat and other chilled foods when they were available at reduced prices.

And here we are, 3 years later. We have seen the number of patrons fluctuate from about 75 up to a peak of 137. When the numbers start to decline we wonder what’s the matter? Are we doing something wrong? Not advertising enough? And then someone will suggest that maybe it’s a good thing --- maybe more people are getting jobs and don’t need our help ----- and then the numbers go up again.

Recently we asked our patrons to fill out a short survey to tell us why they come to our pantry and what they like best about it. After Pastor Eric reviewed all the comments, he found that they fell into 3 basic categories. As you would expect, the main reason given for coming to the pantry is for the food. It’s pretty simple ---- there are many people --

- including some of our neighbors right here in Suffield, who just don't have enough resources to provide themselves and their families with basic nutritious meals on a daily basis.

When I first began volunteering at the food pantry, I didn't truly appreciate what that meant – not being able to buy enough food to feed your family every day. It wasn't like the horrific scenes that are on the news showing starving children in Africa and other places far away from Connecticut. The people who come to Crossroads look pretty much the same as you and me. The new people are often embarrassed and don't want to make eye contact – they just want to get their food and get out. Others want to tell you their story – how they lost their job, or have huge medical bills.

But as the months and now years have gone by, I've gotten to know many of the 'regulars'. When the line slows down and there's time to chat with the people as they collect their food, they often share stories about their families and other things going on with their lives. Reflecting on those moments – the conversations with many of the food pantry patrons, my thoughts turn to my own family. Our sons are grown and have their own homes but they come over for Sunday dinner every week. We splurge and cook enough food for leftovers for everyone, plus plenty of wine and more baked goodies than any of us need. But it's more than the food and drink --- it's the conversation that's even more important --- sharing what's going on in all our lives. The food is just an excuse to get together.

I've come to realize that our patrons are not so different from me. They want the same things - to provide for themselves and their family. If I can give of my time to make it a little easier for them, then I'm grateful to do so. I believe Crossroads Food Pantry is a small step toward answering Jesus' call to --- "Tend My sheep."