



ARCHDIOCESE OF NEWARK

PARISH FOOD PANTRY NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to our Newsletter

In order to support all of our committed parishioners working in our Parish Food Pantries we wanted to share this newsletter as a place to share news and best practices.

In our Archdiocese we have a great diversity of parishes and peoples. Similarly, the food insecurity that so many people are facing in these days are diverse. Our Food Pantries also serve very different and diverse populations with many different needs.

We want this newsletter to be a place where we can support one another, share news and network.

If you have something to share, please email me at Rev.Timothy.Graff@rcan.org so we can share it with the rest of the members of the Archdiocese.

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Food Pantry Workshops

One result of our Food Pantry meetings over the past year was a desire for a series of workshops for our volunteers to help them in their specific areas of concern.

We will be repeating the Food Pantry Basics, Forming a Plan and Practical Steps on Tuesday, March 29th, at 7:00 pm via Zoom. This will serve as an introduction for those who are just starting a Food Pantry, those who are new to the ministry or as a place to review and evaluate the work of your food pantry.

[Click here to Register for the March 29th Workshop](#)

We will be looking for help with the workshops, so if your food pantry has a particular strength in one of these areas, please contact me so we can share your experiences in these areas.

Upcoming Workshops:

- How to Best Network with Other Faith Communities in Your Area April 21
- How To Be Effective in Collecting Food and Donations May 5
- Best Practices in Engaging Volunteers May 24
- How to Best Serve our Clients June 6

Getting Clients Cell Phone Numbers

One point of discussion that arose at our last meeting was the advantages and disadvantages of having our clients' cell phone numbers. It was seen as a great tool of communication but some concerns were raised about safety.

Two members of our Food Insecurity Task Force would like to share their experiences with the use of cell phones with their clients:

Patty Vignola from St. Bartholomew's parish in Scotch Plains shared:

I have the cell phone numbers of our food pantry clients at St Bartholomew the Apostle Church in Scotch Plains. This enables us to easily reach our clients if the pantry needs to be closed due to weather (snow) or illness (i.e. the surge in pandemic cases this past winter closed us for a week). Conversely it enables the clients to notify me that they are not picking up their food on a specific Friday – this way their bag of food is not outside in the elements. This avoids waste.

Due to COVID our current food pantry program was set up to be as "contactless" as possible. Having cell phone numbers allows us to build relationships with our clients since we're not face to face. I can report that I have had no issues with clients having my personal cell phone number. I have not experienced any abuse or have had a reason to block a number.

Texting has proved a useful and efficient vehicle to communicate with our clients.

Examples:

- *This past Christmas extra gifts were donated via our Advent Tree Program. I was able to reach out to clients who have young children, ask if they would be interested and arranged for same day pick up. Receiving a large contractor bag filled with gifts made the holidays extra special for these families.*
- *Texting also helps with clients who are not proficient with English. They are more comfortable texting – possibly using Google Translate to assist them. We have a client who was pregnant – she had the baby in January and English is her second language. As luck would have it the St Barts Pantry received various baby donations – baby stroller, pack 'n play, swing, portable crib, diapers, wipes. I was able to communicate with her quickly to inquire about interest in these items (and send photos) and ultimately make pick up arrangements. This allows us to help clients beyond their food needs.*

In summary I find texting with our clients an efficient and necessary method of communication. Thanks.

Patti Vignola



Food Pantry Needs



Share Your Story!

Please feel free to share any ideas, stories or pictures for upcoming newsletters.

Please send to

Rev.Timothy.Graff@rcan.org