“Oh, ye of little faith”

In the winter of 1989, Pastor Erica Wimber of Essex’s First Baptist Church learned that people in her community were going hungry. One parishioner reported that an elderly couple regularly was picking garbage out of dumpsters.

Some in the community were stunned, firm in their belief “there’s no poverty here”. But church members decided to serve one free meal as an experiment.

They publicized this meal and asked for donations of food and funding. Volunteers prepared a hot meal, and as they waited with deep anticipation, a woman walked in and handed them a $50 gift certificate for a local grocery store. As she began to leave, they said, “Wait, we don’t know if we’re going to do this again. We don’t know if anyone will come.”

The woman turned and said, “Ah, ye of little faith”.

Eleven people came that day; the second meal brought fourteen. After that, meals were served weekly. Today, eight meal sites serve on average 1,400 meals each month.

Locally Grown for All

Fresh locally grown vegetables are largely out of financial reach for those living in poverty.

The guests of The Shoreline Soup Kitchens Pantries are the beneficiaries of a garden carved out of the woods behind Grace Church in Old Saybrook seven years ago by a small band of volunteers.

Since then, the garden has grown five times its size with a volunteer crew of over 120 gardeners and drivers who also collect fruits and vegetables from six area farm stands to add to the larder.

At the height of the season it takes a couple of trucks just to deliver one day’s of produce to a pantry, and there are tomatoes for all, because no one should go a summer without a local tomato.

860.388.1988
Visit us online at www.shorelinesoupkitchens.org

Confronting Hunger in the Land of Plenty

A woman who regularly donated food to the soup kitchens came to one of our pantries recently fighting tears as she told us she was picking up food, not dropping it off. Her husband was just laid off from his long time job.

Another woman back in March told pantry volunteers she only needed help for a couple of weeks until she either got a job or cashed in her 401K and her son’s college savings. She was still coming to us in August.

In 2006, there were 35.5 million hungry Americans. Even if we were to double the nation’s charitable food distribution system, we would still have 32 million hungry Americans.

Our statistics show that in 2008, those who attended our pantries received, on average, 75 meals each for the year. It follows that even doubling our efforts will not solve the local issue of hunger.
Poverty: No Longer Other People’s Problem

The other day at one of the pantries a mother shopping with her two young ones in tow had to make the decision between a can of coffee and a bottle of juice. She took the juice.

The majority of those who come to our pantries, like her, are not starving but many are hungry and deprived of the basic foods. They have to make hard choices: skip meals so they can pay bills or so their children can eat. They are stuck in a deep and widening gap between self sufficiency and the federal poverty guidelines.

In lower Middlesex County, self sufficiency represents 200%-300% of federal poverty rates—until helping programs are based on the self sufficiency standards we will continue to serve hundreds of thousands of meals each year.

In the first six months of 2009, 428,343 meals have been distributed

Our Neighbors in Need

Every week, at one of five pantries, our neighbors can receive enough fresh and non perishable food to feed their families for three days.

The stories they tell are all different and all the same. The most common sentiment is that of thanks. Gratitude that kind people are willing to give of themselves to volunteer and gratitude that generous people make donations to support the pantries.

We received the following thank you note at our Old Lyme Pantry & Meal Site.

Dear Friends -On behalf of my family, I would like to say thank you. Thank you for taking time out of your schedule and life to help people like us have some food to feed our family. Thank you to all the people who prepare our breakfast, stock the shelves, help us when we don’t know where to go, etc. So many helpers, so much time. I just wanted all of you to know that I am thankful for everything and I am thankful that God has allowed me to be part of this and he is taking care of me and a lot of other people too!!!! Thank you, Thank you, Thank you, May God bless you as you all have done for us.

Love, a family from the pantry

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<tr>
<th>Towns</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Total Served</th>
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