

Generosity in Motion ~ August 5, 2020

“Let all that you do be done in love.” ~ I Corinthians 16:14

I like to think that our neighbors, the people living and working in the communities around our congregations, see us as places where God is showing up to feed, clothe, protect and support them, as well as a place for them to join in sharing their gifts and love for others. I also wonder how God might be inviting us to join where God himself appears in the neighborhood so that we can partner together and build deeper connections.

Today I want to begin thanking you for the ways you are embracing and leading ministry of love towards others. We are immensely grateful for your intentional care and presence with people throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our call to respond with love to our neighbors and protect the most vulnerable among us continues strong during these summer months while we continue to face this remarkably disruptive moment. Our churches never closed, and we never stopped worshipping God, proclaiming the good news, making disciples, living out the Gospel, loving neighbors, and doing justice in Jesus’ name. We are part of a church that engages



Figure 1: Pastor Jose Escalera and leaders at Epiphany LC in Pleasantville getting ready to share food with neighbors.



Figure 2 & 3: Bags of food being prepared and distributed at Christus in Camden by Pastor Jesse Brown and community partners.



in the holy practice of listening to God’s invitation to feed and provide for guests and neighbors and that continues to take action to collectively work to eradicate hunger, racism and injustice in our church, in our communities, and in the world. And we know that all these words, deeds and actions come from God who loved us first. It is God’s love in you that is being shared with others and that makes this world a better place for all.

Here are some glimpses of robust feeding ministries among congregations in our Synod, which were awarded a grant from the ELCA Lutheran Disaster Response.

Pastor Jesse W. Brown, Jr., from Christus Evangelical Lutheran Church in Camden shares that *“we serve a generous and great God!”* and continues with: *“The COVID-19 pandemic has expanded the need for people to get food. Christus Lutheran, the Sisters of Saint Joseph and Wholesome Riches have partnered to expand our food distribution and do it within the health and safety protocols of Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Just before the pandemic we served about 200 families a month. Now we serve over 1000 families a month stretching our resources but not our resolve to meet the need.”*

St. Stephan's Grace Community, in Newark, is also attentive to the needs of neighbors. Pastor Moacir Weirich shared this story: *"Mrs. R. called the church in distress asking if the church had any food to give out. I told her that I would drop off a bag of groceries the next day, to which she was very thankful. I soon learned, during a conversation with her over the phone, that she was the mother of 2 children. She was out of work due to cancer treatment and her husband was also out of work because of the pandemic. Every item of food that we were able to provide brought her family joy and relief. When we included her in the NJ Pandemic Relief fund gift card program, through which she received a \$1,000.00 gift card, she screamed so loud for joy that the neighbor knocked on her door to check if everything was okay. She has been joining us during our virtual services ever since. She says that she does not know what would have happened without the church's help. And always ends our conversations saying, 'but God is good'!"*



Figure 4: Food line around the block at St. Stephan's Grace.



Figure 5: God's abundance shared with children and families at Bridge of Peace.

Another testimony in the words of Pastor Giselle Coutinho, from Bridge of Peace in Camden: *"Two weeks ago we fed 50 children and youth just through our VBS programs and 100's of others each Monday night. Our VBS also served the seven children we have on the spectrum. It's allowed us to engage them especially those who will be confirmed in the next two years."* You can read more about Bridge of Peace story on the LifeLines Spring 2020 page 4 from the ELCA World Hunger:

<https://www.elca.org/assets/LifeLinesSpring2020/mobile/index.html>

From Pleasantville to Trenton, from Camden to Newark, from Woodbury to Woodcliff Lake, from Red Bank to Dover, God's

love in Christ shows by making sure people are fed. Saint Bartholomew in Trenton is working to give people what they need spiritually, and physically, to help the community have hope and assist in improving their life. Pastor Erich Kussman stated: *"I don't think it's ever been about the thing a person receives, whether its food, clothing, a worship service, or anything else. It's about hope. Everyone needs help along the way. Some of us got the boost we needed from a strong family, but for many in our community, Saint Bart's is their family, nudging them every day toward a better life"*.



Figure 6: Lunch bags offered at St. Bart.

Thank you for your generosity in bringing hope and love to your community for the sake of the Gospel. Blessings to each of you in the weeks ahead and thank you again for your love and presence in the church and in the community. Remember, we serve a generous and great God!

Your sibling in Christ,
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