

“View From Beyond the Pew”

A reflection column in our parish bulletin written by our parishioners

This week, we have the story of the history and recent upgrades to the All Saints Parish Food Pantry by Jerry Costello. Our Food Pantry has done amazing work throughout the pandemic, and is ready to do so well into the future! If you are interested in helping at the Food Pantry, please email us at foodpantry@allsaintshaverhill.org God bless! Fr. Chris

The All Saints Food Pantry was founded in 2002 and we are located in the basement of the rectory. Our Mission is to serve those in need by feeding the hungry in the greater Haverhill area. We rely on the generosity of the community and the dedication of our volunteers to sustain these efforts. The Lowell Food Bank and the Greater Boston Food Bank provide the bulk of the food; a portion of it is free and some is bought at a discounted price.

When we first began, we used a paper filing system. The clients were given their 3' x 5' cards when they checked in, then they proceeded to another room and gave the card to volunteers who gave them a number of prepackaged bags of food according to their family size. Those who qualified for USDA food were given USDA food. At the end of the day, the 3' x 5' cards were placed back into a metal box in alphabetical order. Most were in alphabetical order, but some were misplaced, and a lot of extra time was spent trying to find the client's card on their next visit to the food pantry.

In 2005, the food pantry was serving more clients and we soon realized we needed a more efficient way to run the food pantry. A group of volunteers met for four weeks to discuss creating a computer program to

collect data, handle food distribution and generate reports. The computer program took three years to design and build and all the time and work were donated.

Three computers, a printer, a scanner, networking equipment and Microsoft Office were donated. It was implemented in 2008. The reports were so extensive that All Saints Food Pantry qualified for more free food from the Greater Boston Food Bank.

All Saints Food Pantry makes it to Hollywood.

Well almost, a representative from the Greater Boston Food Bank heard about the system at All Saints food pantry and contacted *Chronicle* on WCVB Channel 5. *Chronicle* came to All Saints Food Pantry to record a televised segment that appeared on TV.

As the years rolled along our computers were getting old and tired. We were running Windows XP and Windows 7 for the operating systems and Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007. This started to create compatibility problems with updated Food Pantry software.

Just recently, we received a grant to buy three new computers, a laptop, two laser printers, two barcode scanners and network equipment. This was like an early Christmas present for the Food Pantry.

Never before had we received a grant to buy computers for the food pantry. Everything we had was donated.

The Food Pantry software program has been updated to run on the new computers. Additionally, the program has two new features. It has a complete inventory system that can be scanned into the system with the barcode readers. Secondly, we are able to generate barcoded client ID's that can be scanned with the barcode readers, this is a Covid-19 safety feature where clients can be outside and we can scan them in without coming into any contact with them, keeping a safe distance from each other.

We want to thank all our community for their generosity, the anonymous donors, all the volunteers, grant writers, and all those who hold the food pantry in a special place in their hearts and prayers.

All Saints Food Pantry supervisor Irene Kryicos scans food into the inventory program.

