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THE DINNER BELL

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF



OUR MISSION:

TO ALLEVIATE FOOD INSECURITY THROUGHOUT ST. MARY'S COUNTY

OUR VISION:

A ST. MARY'S COUNTY FREE FROM HUNGER



WHAT'S INSIDE:

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- *LEXINGTON PARK ELEMENTARY TEAMS UP WITH FSM TO FEED ST. MARY'S*

As the Phase One Roll-out becomes a reality, Feed St. Mary's Food Bank is beginning to take shape. Refrigeration units and vast amounts of shelving have been installed. The hard work of a community of volunteers is coming together to Feed St. Mary's!

RESPONDING TO THE MOMENT

By Greg Syler

It'd be interesting to do a history project on food pantries and feeding ministries in St. Mary's County. From what I can tell, most of our food pantries started to emerge after the great post-War growth – the boom – had begun to crest. Back then, our predecessors saw a need and responded. That's what we're doing, today. Like them, we're responding to the needs of our time, responding to our moment.

Back in the mid-1980s, some members of Church of the Ascension, the Episcopal Church in Lexington Park knew that the upward mobility of those post-War years had not only crested but, in fact, had rendered Lexington Park, at least downtown Lexington Park, an urban hub. So Ascension started a food pantry – a “food locker,” they called it. They put some shelves in the unused area under the steps in the downstairs undercroft and started giving out non-perishable food to those who needed it. That's where the food pantry is, today. Ascension's story was replicated, I'm sure, in lots of churches and community organizations throughout St. Mary's County.

In a nutshell, that's the story of most people who feel called to start some kind of feeding ministry. Oftentimes, one person, or a few people sense a need – they see someone who is in need, or they run across someone who is hungry, or a member of their family or congregation reaches out for help. “We can do something about that,” they say – first to themselves, and then to a few others, and then the ministry starts. Most of our food pantries and most churches who support and run food pantries started in just this way: there's a problem, we can fix it.

And that's where feeding ministries have, for the most part, stayed in St. Mary's County. Not that that's a bad thing. We are working hard to feed hungry people and meet the needs of those who are in need. Many of us, Ascension included, are so committed to keeping our doors open – being for our neighbors a space of genuine hospitality and welcome – that we'll continue to do this work regardless of how efficient or effective we may (or may not) be. We're doing it because we're called to this work. We're doing it because the community needs us to do it. We're doing it because we don't want individuals to be hungry. Period.

But all that has started to shift, once again. While I'm sure I can say that every single food pantry in St. Mary's County is busy doing good work, the trends of lopsided economic growth and uneven distribution of resources – trends which started long, long ago in our County – have only continued, and are continuing at a quickening pace. There just aren't as many resources as there once were, and yet our County is growing. Jobs are plentiful, but they're generally not the types of jobs that can provide meaningful employment and access to the resources previous generations enjoyed without question. The ‘working poor’ are still working, oftentimes several jobs, but many aren't able to make ends meet. Meanwhile, every food pantry is still working by itself, not as part of a coordinated mission-focused effort with other pantries and other food resources. That's not really true about the *food* itself – for I can tell you, firsthand, that donated food quite literally travels from store to pantry, oftentimes from pantry to pantry – but the local pantry operations are pretty much isolated silos. Add to that: busy isolated silos. But busy-ness is no longer a primary determination for success. Are there ways, food pantry leaders are now asking, to look outside of ourselves, toward our neighbors? Are there more sustainable models?

These new questions hold a great deal of hope, not only for those persons in our community who are the ‘working poor’ and those who are being helped but also for the collective mission of a County, *our* County which is determined, now, to let no one go hungry. This shift in awareness is what is behind Feed St. Mary's, St. Mary's County first-ever food bank.

Feed St. Mary's is not only the vision of several charismatic individuals and organizations, it is also a product of a groundswell from those within these feeding ministries. Feed St. Mary's is what happens when people start asking different questions, and start ‘flipping’ the dilemma: asking questions about partnership, collaboration, resource sharing, sustainability, service, being good neighbors, and doing justice, no longer being satisfied with handouts but wondering about how we can help people find a hand-up. Feed St. Mary's is more than a storefront, or an institution. Feed St. Mary's is a coalition.

RESPONDING TO THE MOMENT (Continued)

Feed St. Mary's is a hub where leaders from community organizations and service clubs and faith-based congregations network with leaders in food pantries and those who know the in's and out's of our neighborhoods, oftentimes those neighborhoods in the greatest need of critical attention. Feed St. Mary's is a coalition where leaders of food pantries have covenanted with one another to work collaboratively instead of as isolated silos. Feed St. Mary's is the next, necessary movement of growth and development in feeding ministries in St. Mary's County, and I'm proud to say that it feels like we're building on the foundational work started not that long ago. But what feels like yesterday (the 1980s weren't *that long ago!*) is a significant distance from where we stand, today, the trends and challenges – and opportunities – we're seeing on the ground.

Like I said, above, it would be interesting to do a history project on food pantries and feeding ministries in St. Mary's County. But, for now, let's let the record show that Feed St. Mary's, our County's first ever food bank, started when the food pantries in St. Mary's County felt called to ask different questions, to flip the dilemmas of busy places serving hurting people and, instead, wonder together about collaboration, networking, resource sharing, sustainability, service, being good neighbors, and doing justice – no longer being satisfied with handouts but wondering about how we can help people find a hand-up.

Just like our predecessors did in their day, we're striving to do in ours – respond to the needs of our time, respond to this moment.



FEED ST. MARY'S
Lexington Park Elementary School
Food Drive
Donations of Canned Food and Non-Perishable Items
Accepted
January 13 - February 14, 2020
Together LPES "CAN" Help Feed St. Mary's



FSM Is Teaming Up With LPES To Feed St. Marys!

The Lexington Park Elementary School is conducting a Food Drive through February 14th. The Fifth Grade Leadership Academy is leading an effort to collect canned foods and non-perishable items that will be donated to Feed St. Mary's. Not only is this a great effort to collect food for those in need, it is a wonderful way for these students to learn about service and leadership in their community. Way to go Pandas!

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FEED ST. MARY'S, INC
46041 Signature Lane
P.O. Box 212
Lexington Park, Maryland 20653
(240) 237-8197
feedstmarys@gmail.com
www.feedstmarys.org

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