

Pantry expansion serves emergency needs

Parish volunteer food ministry is working with Prince William County's Emergency Food Distribution Network.

Dale City Holy family church

By Leslie Miller

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To assist with emergency food needs resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, the volunteer food pantry at Holy Family Church in Dale City is working with Prince William County to dramatically expand its food distribution capacity.

The pantry has been tapped to serve as one of the 12 “spokes” of the county’s Emergency Food Distribution Network, a change that took effect April 20, said church volunteer George “Digger” Smith, who coordinates pantry operations.

The county recently began making weekly food deliveries to the pantry to provide supplies from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The pantry also continues to rely on its existing supply chain, which includes the St. Lucy Food Project, run by diocesan Catholic Charities, Smith said.

Pantry activities have moved out of their small storage closets and taken over the school gymnasium and kitchen, so volunteers can spread out to allow an appropriate distance while gathering and packing food for clients. Smith estimates the recent changes will allow the pantry to serve approximately 400 to 500 adults and children a week — four times the number it could serve in the past.

“Ever since COVID-19 came up, we have been adapting ourselves to continue to serve while being respectful of distancing” needs, said Holy Family pastor Father Wilson I. Korpi. Clients call in advance to explain their family size and what they need, and “we bring baskets of food out to them and try to keep our distance as best we can. Everybody is appropriately masked and gloved.”

At a time when more county residents face economic pressures caused by the pandemic, there has been a steep decline in the amount of food donated

by parishioners, Smith said.

To make it safe and easy to donate without having to go to the grocery store, Holy Family has created an Amazon “wish list” to allow parishioners and community members to purchase urgently needed items online and have them shipped directly to the church.

The pantry is staffed largely by Holy Family parishioners and the John Paul I Council of the Knights of Columbus. Community members from the Volunteer Prince William organization also assist, for a total of about 35 people, said Smith, a retired engineer who is prepared for the long haul.

“I expect that keeping people fed is going to be a challenge that lasts well beyond the medical impact of the pandemic,” he said. Urgent pantry needs, listed in the parish bulletin, include Jell-O, canned tuna, canned pasta, hearty soup, canned fruit, complete pancake mix, pancake syrup, saltine crackers, ramen noodles, Tuna Helper, Chicken Helper, Hamburger Helper and breakfast cereal. Other requested items include spaghetti sauce, pasta, vegetable oil, instant potatoes, rice in 1-2 lb. bags, rice mixes, onions and oranges.

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Holy Family food pantry volunteer Christina Filipowski puts boxed meals in a cart for clients.

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