

THE RIVER

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VISION IS NOW A REALITY

By Andy Czerkas, Co-Director, The River Food Pantry

To serve the needy has been on our hearts for over 10 years. It's a good thing that God has patience with us.

We began to work with the Packer and Northport neighborhoods in the summer of 2000 through a Mad City Church ministry which worked with the Neighborhood Learning Centers' staff to provide Christmas presents, monthly dinners, school supplies and Easter egg hunts for the children. While serving the neighborhoods, the neighborhoods served us by opening our eyes and hearts and minds to the wonderful people living and working there. None of what we are now doing would be possible without the blessing those neighborhoods have been in our lives and the changes they have provoked in us.

Two years ago, our pastor asked my wife, Jenny, and me

if we would consider starting a food pantry with the church's support. We didn't feel prepared to begin such a task but the seed was planted. It began to grow when our co-director, Tom Thuemling, started asking us to come and help at the House of Hope Pantry on the south side. Tom had been part of that ministry for over a year. Jenny and I finally joined in for the last half year before the pantry closed.

I still vividly remember the first time we went there. God touched my heart with an incredible excitement and a certain knowledge that we were supposed to pursue this. Serving people with compassion, love and respect became a wonderful part of our weekly routine. I know that Jenny and Tom felt spoken to in the same way.

We began to seriously explore

a north side pantry in May of last year, focusing on finding a suitable space and financial support. We wanted to stay on the north side so we could continue and expand our 6 year long relationships with the Northport neighborhoods.

The support came in the form of grants from Mad City Church and the Housing Ministries of the American Baptists in Wisconsin. In August we signed the lease for the pantry, developed a floor plan and began construction in November.

The vision for "The River" has several components. First, we want to serve people in need with a pantry, dinner and free clothing and do so with respect and love.

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We want to provide an environment that emphasizes per-

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RIVER FOOD PANTRY MISSION STATEMENT

"TO BRING A MESSAGE OF MERCY AND HOPE TO THOSE IN NEED BY PROVIDING NUTRITIONAL BASICS AND ENCOURAGEMENT; TO BE A UNIFYING, SERVANT HEARTED AND COMMUNITY BUILDING EXPRESSION OF JESUS CHRIST IN MADISON."

THE RIVER AT WORK IN MADISON

After less than a year of planning and construction, The River Food Pantry is finally open on Madison's northeast side.

The River Food Pantry is a non profit, faith based, volunteer driven organization that provides meals, food pantry items, clothing and prayer.

The River Food Pantry is lo-

cated at 2201 Darwin Road, on Madison's northeast side, close to the Northport and Packer Communities that helped inspire this vital ministry.

Thanks to countless volunteers and the financial generosity of Mad City Church, Housing Ministries of the American Baptists in Wisconsin and many other individuals

and organizations, this ministry is now helping many families every week.

The River Food Pantry is open every Friday evening, beginning at 5:00 P.M. when clients are able to register to use the food pantry.

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Starting at 6:00 P.M. dinner is served and clients are able to



The RIVER Photo Journal . . .



First night's kitchen crew!



The children's area.



The serving line for Friday night's dinner.



First night of The River Food Pantry's opening.



Time for desert!



Friday night's are very busy in The River Food Pantry kitchen.

ORGANIZATIONS GENEROUS WITH THEIR SUPPORT!

American Indoor Environments ▪ Anchor Bank ▪ Bethel Lutheran Church ▪ Capital Water Softener Inc. ▪ Circuit City ▪ Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups ▪ CUNA Mutual Group Foundation, Inc. ▪ Design Build Fire Protection ▪ Ferguson Bath & Kitchen Gallery ▪ Fred Miller Construction ▪ Havey Plumbing, Inc. ▪ Home Depot ▪ Housing Ministry of the American Baptists in WI ▪ Jim Conant Construction LLC ▪ Joe Daniels Construction Company ▪ Kessenich's, Ltd. ▪ Lackey's Floor Covering ▪ Little Caesar's Pizza ▪ Mad City Church ▪ Madison Environmental Group ▪ Pellitteri Waste Systems ▪ Pete Welch Plumbing ▪ Raith Painting ▪ Rocky Rococo ▪ Pan Style Pizza ▪ Sam's Club ▪ Scott Rake Painting ▪ Simonson Brothers of Wisconsin Inc. ▪ Soldiers of Grace, Christian Motorcycle Association ▪ Solid State Construction ▪ St. Paul Lutheran Church ▪ St. Peter Catholic Church ▪ Staples ▪ Subway ▪ TDS Construction ▪ Zingg Design

AT WORK (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

start using the food pantry on a first come, first serve basis. The food pantry stays open until everyone is served.

News of The River Food Pantry is spreading rapidly throughout Madison and Dane County. Since opening on March 31st, the Pantry has served over 500 households. Clients come from a variety of different backgrounds with different needs.

While some individuals are facing issues like unemployment and being underemployed, others are living on very little income because of their reliance on Social Security, disability or veteran benefits.

"I feel like I'm being treated like royalty," said one woman who has been coming to the food pantry for the last few weeks.

Clients are able to take home up to 12-15 lbs. of canned goods and a variety of other food stuffs, including cereal, canned soup, cake

mixes, canned vegetables and fruit. Additionally, clients are able to take home milk, bread, potatoes, onions and meat and cheese.

Before or after clients use the food pantry, they are able to enjoy a hot meal that is prepared in The River Food Pantry kitchen. Since opening The River, it has served over 1000 meals to individuals.

"We enjoy the atmosphere, the people and the food. They give us a lot of food to take to the rescue mission," said Katherine Clawson, who has been coming to the River Food Pantry for several weeks now.

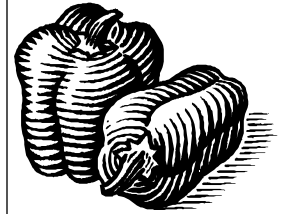
The need for an additional food pantry in Madison is greater than ever before. 15% (or 33,000) of all people living in Madison live below the poverty level. Additionally, the use of food pantries in Dane and surrounding counties has increased 34% since 2001.

Volunteers begin preparing for the

opening of the food pantry every Friday by coming together on Thursday evenings at 5:00 P.M. to clean the facility, stock the pantry shelves with food and make initial preparations for the meal.

Beginning around noon on Friday, volunteers begin the process of preparing and cooking the meal and make other preparations like setting-up the registration area and assigning volunteers to assist in various areas of the food pantry, including the registration area, kitchen and the food pantry itself.

The River Food Pantry is an action orientated, faith based ministry that benefits the hearts of volunteers and clients alike. If you or your family would like to learn more about The River Food Pantry, please feel free to visit any Friday evening after 5:00 P.M. [END]



DID YOU KNOW?

\$100 will pay for food for up to 8 families of 3 for 1 week.

\$250 will underwrite one Friday night dinner for up to 200 people.

\$500 will cover the purchase of food for ½ month of operation.

\$1,000 will cover the purchase of food for a full month of operation.

\$5,000 will cover the cost of all operational expenses and the purchase of food for one month.

A REALITY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

sonal contact and developing of relationships. We always want to encourage our pantry clients and point them in the direction of growth. We accept all as they are, just as God accepts us as we are. It's not our job to judge them, change them, or push religion at them. We are there to serve.

A second component is our service to the churches of Madison. We want to provide a vehicle for churches to act, in unity, as the Church. The Church that goes where needed, to serve people and the community and will partner with the community in acts of service. We can put aside our doctrinal differences and focus on the core commandments of loving God and loving our neighbors. On an individual basis, the process of serving transforms us, lets God change our hearts, minds and atti-

tudes. In serving people, we get to know them and see them also as children of God, as brothers and sisters.

That was the vision and it is now a reality.

We have been open for a month and a half and have grown by leaps and bounds. We serve over 85 families each Friday night. Many have been there each week and we are getting to know them, call them by name and speak with them each week. A number of pantry users are also volunteers, an ideal situation.

People take note that we care about them. We get hugs every week as people respond to love and compassion. Some have told us that they come mostly for the friendly atmosphere, dinner and fellowship. Others are interested

in what makes us act this way. Some know and others don't that we do this because of the joy God has put in our hearts. Our volunteers spend time eating with clients or just sit and visit for awhile. We offer to pray for people at the beginning of the evening but never push prayer on anyone.

Our volunteers can't stop smiling. Several have told me: "I had a terrible week but this makes it all worthwhile." "I get energy from this place." "This is the best part of the week for me." "My heart started to sing when I got here and it hasn't stopped." I think that's true for many of us. Come join us, see for yourself. [END]

I think that's true for many of us. Come join us, see for yourself.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of ways you can help in addition to volunteering on Thursday or Friday evenings. The River Food Pantry is looking for individuals interested in joining our Finance and Communications Work Groups.

FINANCE WORK GROUP

If you have experience in grant writing or would like to help reach out and develop financial support for the Pantry among businesses and individuals, please e-mail Andy Czerkas at jandaczerkas@charter.net.

COMMUNICATIONS WORK GROUP

This group will be responsible for developing a quarterly newsletter and other materials in order to keep friends of The River Food Pantry informed of the latest news and events. If you have a writing or graphic arts background, please e-mail John Plumitis at johnplumitis@yahoo.com.

Thanks again for your support!

ITEMS STILL NEEDED

The River Food Pantry still needs a number of items that will help make our facility fully functional. If you are able to donate one or more items, please contact Andy or Jenny Czerkas at (608) 442-8815 or riverfoodpantry@yahoo.com

Thank you!

- Financial support. (Rent is \$2,700 a month, utilities are \$500+, food costs, etc.)
- 8 ceiling fans
- Data projector
- Patio blocks for outside patio
- Really big pots (4 gallon +)
- Grocery carts, 12 or more.
- Canned tuna and meat
- Canned fruit
- Breakfast cereal

“The presence of God is in this place. People can sense the genuine care that these people have for them.”

*John Rolfsmeyer,
Volunteer, The River Food Pantry*

“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the LORD, who remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.”

Psalm 146: 5-8

HELP THE RIVER FOOD PANTRY!

We can always use your help! You may drop this card off by The River Food Pantry table on Sunday or mail this card to the address below. Please visit our web site: www.theriver-madison.org. Thanks!

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Best Phone Number: _____ E-mail: _____

How do you want to help?

- Contribute Fundraising Newsletter Meal Preparation
- Available Thursday night to clean & stock the food pantry.
- Available Friday night to help with the meal, the pantry or wherever needed.

If you have any questions, please contact Andy or Jenny Czerkas at (608) 442-8815 or riverfoodpantry@yahoo.com.



The River Food Pantry - 2201 Darwin Rd - Madison, WI 53704