

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep". A command that is both literal and figurative. Food and specifically the sharing of food is central to our faith. The Disciples did not recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus until he sat with them and shared a meal. We find the essence of Jesus revealed to us each week as we celebrate the Eucharist.

For last month's Mission Moment, Pres related the history of the Meals on Wheels program. This month I will also talk about food for our neighbors who face food insecurity.

We have been collecting food at the back of the church sanctuary on a regular basis since, I think, 2009. It began after we considered the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the first of which is to eliminate Hunger. Initially, we donated the food to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. But about two years into this mission we learned that the food is actually distributed to those in need by the many food pantries in the community. And we realized that to the extent the food pantries were relying on the Food Bank, they were paying for transportation of the free food. So we decided to cut out the middleman (or person) and donate directly to three food pantries: Allan Chapel's "Loaves and Fishes", the Central United Methodist food pantry and the Verona Community Food Pantry.

We have generally delivered the food when the boxes in the back are full, generally once every 2-3 months, in rotation to the three pantries. It amounts to 2-300 pounds of food each time. A couple of years ago we added paper and personal hygiene products to our donations, items that the smaller food pantries especially appreciate.

Feeding the Lord's sheep is a physical act of compassion. But it is also a spiritual experience. In thinking of hungry neighbors as we cruise the grocery aisles we are entering a spiritual communion with them. And Sharon and I, who do the majority of deliveries, have also found it rewarding to meet and work with members of other churches and organizations in our common mission.

A few practical tips for contributing food:

Your contributions may be in the back of the church for weeks and it gets hot in there. Give canned goods and dry goods.

Look for nutritious foods, protein is important as in peanut butter, canned meats, beans.

Include some foods that can be opened without a can opener and eaten without preparation. Hungry people do come by the church and Shelby and Lucy will at times offer food from our collection boxes. We keep a few plastic utensils in the boxes for that purpose.

In the paper collection, baby diapers, feminine hygiene products, toilet paper as well as toothpaste, toothbrushes and soap are very helpful for families with limited resources.

So as we make our way to Food Lion, Kroger or Martins, Let us remember sheep. Amen