

I began my Christian journey at a very young age. I was reared in a Christian home and I attended church at the Northside Church of God, St. Louis, Missouri under the auspices of Pastor Luella Kimble and later Pastor Ira L. Bailey, Sr.

Brother and Sister Walter Duncan first introduced me to the work of going out into homes, cleaning and doing whatever the family needed. Little did I know in my early years that the Lord was grooming me for later in life to do the work I am doing today. In May 2005, the Northside Church of God and the Riverview Church of God united and became one congregation under the leadership of Pastor Andre Epps. The joining was ordained by *god* and has been a win/win situation for all. *Praise god.*

I always had a desire to help others and to be a blessing wherever I can. With retiring in my near future the desire began to burn hotter and hotter. This meant that I could be able to be in full-time ministry instead of part-time. I was getting excited about different ways to reach people in the church neighborhood.

I began seeking God's direction regarding His will for my life after retirement. One of the things that came to mind was the use of the Fellowship Hall next door to the church. We desired to open the Fellowship Hall at two or three times a month for community fellowship, Bible study, and snacks. This was one idea that I considered. The other idea was a lunch program for the children who were out of school for the summer. We pursued this program for the summer and it ended in August of 2007.

With the desire still burning brightly in my spirit and heart, I kept seeking God's direction and looking for ways to reach the people and bring them to the church so they could fellowship with the church and the people who worshiped there. One day this idea came to me: Bring the People to You. We had been going out and everyone was promising we will come and bring the children, but they never showed up. To this day I still don't know where the idea for a pantry came from. I started to check into food pantries—how to go about starting one and what I need to do to determine if there was a need for a pantry in the neighborhood of our church.

A year later on September 23, 2008, the Riverview Church of God (St. Louis, Missouri) Food Pantry opened its doors. We have been open for five years as of 2013. We served 5,258 individuals in 2013, and 1,592 families. Every family who enter our doors leaves with a nicely packed box of food, fresh vegetables, canned food, bread, cheese, milk, and a host of other items. No one ever leaves empty handed because of lack of food. The Lord has blessed the pantry and we have something for everyone who shows up early or late. To God Be the Glory.

The pantry has a dedicated group of women and men from the church who work tirelessly to make the pantry a success. These individuals show up every other Monday to pick up food items from the agencies that supply the pantry. We stack the shelves and then we start to pack boxes for the next day which is Tuesday the day of distributions. We have a system we try to follow so that everything will flow smoothly when we open our doors at 11:00 AM. As you might have guessed not always do things go as you planned, but most of the time it flows like clockwork and we are able to get everyone out in record time.

One of the goals of the faith-based food pantry was to feed the whole individual; physically and spiritually. On July 19, 2011, the evangelistic team became part of the pantry. Many of the people who came to the pantry for food needed prayer, spiritual counseling, someone to listen and someone to

share with them. This team is made up of a minister, a prison minister teacher, and a deacon/new convert teacher. The response to this service was and still is overwhelmingly received. Now we are a well-rounded faith-based food pantry with the mission of feeding the whole individual.

The pantry is constantly increasing as the needs of the people increase. The Lord has continued to increase our supplies as the need increases. Five years we have been open and not one time have we turned anyone away. *To god be the glory.*

The connection between churches and food pantries or banks is longstanding. Churches established the first food pantries, initially to support their own congregants who fell upon hard time. Ultimately, many churches expanded the scope of their food banks to assist people in need beyond their own members.

During the Great Depression food pantries or banks independent of churches were established in communities across the United States in ever increasing numbers. A trend began which continues to this day in which many food pantries, including those with some sort of religious foundation, are operated independently of any individual church or religious organization.

The 2003 AmeriCorps Guidance provides the following definition for faith-based organizations: A faith-based organization is a religious congregation (church, mosque, synagogue, or temple) or an organization, program, or project sponsored/hosted by a religious congregation (may be incorporated or not incorporated). It can be a nonprofit organization founded by a religious congregation or religiously-motivated incorporators and board members that clearly states in its name, incorporation, or mission statement that it is a religiously motivated institution or a collaboration of organizations that clearly and explicitly includes organizations from the previously described categories. These organizations tend to respond to the felt needs of the community they originate from. They grow out of a desire to serve others while solving problems present in the population they serve. Faith-based pantries mobilize residents or members as volunteers for service delivery. They are physically present within a community to bring a sense of comfort and assurance to that community of residents. Faith-based pantries better represent the ethnic delivering services.

Also, in 2003, President Bush commissioned a study on faith-based food pantries. The results are these: Faith-based food pantries are more holistic in that they meet the whole needs for their patrons. They place program participants in an ongoing support network that provides role models and assistance as well as connects participants to the community. This provides a more effective service allowing ease in approaching participants in ways secular food pantries cannot. This study seeks to confirm the effectiveness of faith-based pantries, considering the impact toward the community with the impact to the church.

Surveys that were taken on this topic were varied and yet consistent in focus. Responding to question number one: What inspired you to open the food pantry at your church? – fifteen respondents from various denominations answered that the community need drove the opening of the church's food pantry; three respondents from various denominations gave no answer to this question; one respondent provided the history of the opening but did not respond to the question; two respondents answered outreach; one respondent answered that Jesus said "Feed the people." Responding to question number nine: What percent of patrons started attending your church or attending other churches after coming to your pantry? – Six respondents from different denominations answered that

zero to five percent of pantry participants attended church after receiving services from the church's pantry. One respondent answered that they keep no records. Seven respondents gave no answer to this question.

Survey results from respondents were varied in the date they began, the number of patrons, and their community outreach. Yet in the process of helping the community the respondents had not met their goal of reaching the community for Christ. From these results, 100-800 individuals of various ages are served by the respondents. Survey results provided the answer to: Are faith-based food pantries an effective evangelistic arm of the church? The conclusion, based on these results is no, faith-based food pantries are not an effective evangelistic arm of the church. The data was derived via questions one and eight. Question one provided little information with need being the predominant response, although need was not qualified. Question eight provided startling data in that a small percentage of patrons followed with a visit to the providing church.

The results of this survey startled and bewildered me. I must conclude that I hoped to receive higher contact and responses to Christ from the efforts of faith-based food pantries. Yet, I am not discouraged. I believe that Christ would feed thousands to allow one to hear the Good News. In Matthew 14:14 the multitude became hungry, the disciples wanted to send them away, but Jesus instructed the disciples to give them something to eat. He was speaking about natural food. We must be aware that most times we must fill the natural needs of people before we can address the spiritual needs. From the information gathered it can be understood that faith-based food pantries are accomplishing this. If we are able to help heal the hurt, we will have a greater opportunity to share God's Word and effectively support the spiritual lives of these patrons. I did not ask this question, but I believe that those pantries that have been operating for twenty and thirty years would concur; we have been doing the work of Christ here in our communities. Impact has been made though has been little seen in attendance in churches. To summarize Matthew 25: 32-40, Jesus is declaring that His coming kingdom will include those who follow His example.

He did not leave a need unmet and we are to emulate His walk. Jesus states in Matthew 25:40, *And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* We are commanded to help our brothers and sisters in their need. Faith-based food pantries are doing this. It is hard to measure the effects of this outreach, save a fed community. But we are also commanded to teach, disciple, and lead those who are seeking life. Though we are not systematic in our efforts at evangelism, we are attempting to complete the work Christ began by teaching the multitude, feeding them, and not turning them away.

This is Christ's good news. My prayer and desire is that we take advantage of these golden opportunities to speak up and be heard. James 1:22 tells us to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves. I am inspired to do all I can for the Lord and to be used by Him.

Lord make me a channel of blessing today;  
Make me a channel of blessing I pray.  
My life possessing,  
My service blessing,  
Make me a channel of blessing today.