

# STORYTELLING

July 2024

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## Co-Laborers in Compassion – “12 Days” at Peninsula Lutheran Church

Twenty percent of the Peninsula School District in Gig Harbor’s student body depend on the National School Lunch Program for their daily nutritional needs which are provided for at school with breakfast and lunch.

Peninsula Lutheran members Bob and Susan Shamblin wondered, what did these families eat during the 12 day winter break? The answer quickly became apparent – God was calling them and PLC to say “what we provide them.”

They now work with school counselors each year to discover twenty families who are the “neediest of the needy” and on a real margin of hunger. Fund raising within the congregation and securing discounts and bulk orders in partnership with Fred Meyer, they use a model learned at Imanuel Presbyterian in Tacoma to provide twelve days of kid friendly meals to these families.

Pastor Chuck Slocum says, “When Bob and Susan first talked to me about the Twelve Days ministry, I wasn’t sure quite what to expect. But, once they led our congregational effort it was a thing of beauty, 60 church volunteers packing and delivering nutritious and plentiful meals to families in need. Bob and Susan organized, raised funds, and purchased food in advance of the pre-Christmas event. It has become a huge annual service event for us.”

That “packing day” has a party atmosphere, and the enthusiasm is amazing. Friends are invited to help. Community is strengthened. There is a lot of energy and excitement that seeps out into the rest of the life of the church.

After everything is packed and sorted, the meals are delivered to families. Congregation members say that this delivery is an “awesome experience.” Not only is there food for twelve days, but PLC has worked with the school counselors to show extravagant love in the form of brand-name cereals, peanut butter that is the family preference of crunchy or creamy, and an unforgettable special treat that is a family favorite. Cake? It’s going to be a huge cake with beautiful decoration. Donuts? There will be fancy kinds, and lots of sprinkles.

“I thought I knew what it was like to be in poverty, but I didn’t.” For PLC’s people, this ministry is a tangible way to grow in discipleship through service. Those who participate find that they want to do more and bring their children and their friends, hoping that they’ll have the same transformative experience.

“It’s a gift to do this,” say the Shamblins. “It’s a true outreach with no other agenda.”

The experiences of the 12 Days ministry are “heartwarming” and heartbreaking” – the epitome of Lutheran both/and – and are turning the attention of individuals and the congregation as a whole toward Christ as he described himself in Matthew 25 – when you cared for the least of these, you cared for me.

~ by Synod Storyteller Chavaleh Forgey