

STORYTELLING

January 2025

“We have become a church of not doing for, but doing with.”

–Pastor Jan Otto, All Saints' Lutheran, Auburn

In 2019, All Saints' Lutheran in Auburn felt a need to reassess their ministry goals and develop a five year plan. (Chuckles welcome about plans made in 2019!) Council members went out two by two into the community to ask the question, “how can our small congregation partner with or support you at this time?”

Across all of the various community groups, schools, elected officials and non-profits, the answers quickly came around to the same topic: “we need help with homelessness and housing insecurity.”

Then the virus hit.

Leadership at All Saints' looked at the shutdowns, the layoffs, and the general anxiety in the world and decided that long-range planning was still important, but that they needed to consider right now the pressing issues that homeless people would face.

What could they do immediately, this very weekend, to help people on the street and in the woods who would be having a harder time than ever finding food?

They didn't miss a beat. A plan was quickly made to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that could be eaten immediately or saved for later, and also get sealed meat products, energy bars, bottled water, first aid and hygiene supplies.

Next step? GO. Be available with items where people are.

They went. Every Thursday since May 2020 a group has met to make sandwiches and organize supplies. Every Friday members of All Saints go to the parking lot of the Kent Senior Center, set up card tables, and lay out food and items that are free for all.

Relationships have developed. People in need first stayed to talk, then began to appear early to help set up. They tentatively began to make requests: socks, a coat, special large and wide shoes for a man with diabetes. The congregation has stepped up to lovingly fill these needs and more.

Since Covid restrictions have lifted, things have gotten even more interesting! All Saints' also has an outreach ministry at Hillside Assisted Living, monthly doing a singalong and some kind of activity. The folks there were restless. “We don't need another craft cluttering our rooms,” they said. “We want to do something useful!” They had heard about the ASLC Homeless Outreach. God was working. They wanted in.

The seniors began to fill ziplock bags with items to be handed out car windows to people asking for help on the street, and congregation members loaded them up for distribution. Candy, hand wipes, chapstick, juice, combs, and even a few dollars were often found in these bags. They expanded to make peanut butter sandwiches, almost a hundred each month. Each bag or sandwich has a printed label: “With love from the the Give-Back Grannies and Grampa – God Loves Everyone!”

Outreach at ASLC has truly become more than ministry “for,” but ministry “with.” From assisted living residents who are engaging with God's restorative work to recipients of food who help distribute it, All Saints is a church that is building relationships, sharing God's love, and most of all honoring everyone's shared humanity as they work together.

Stay tuned for *another* incredible story coming soon from All Saints', another “ministry with” in their Community Children's Christmas Festival!

~ by Synod Storyteller Chavaleh Forgey