



REFLECTING, REIMAGINING, RECOMMITTING

This month we are celebrating 27 years of providing food relief packages for hungry families. Although the work's dimensions and scope have changed over the years, our mission and the mandate we have placed on ourselves have remained constant: to help ensure that everyone in our community has enough food to eat--to provide food for hungry families in a way that respects their human dignity while creating community



across the lines which have tended to separate us. And the deeper we have gone into the work we believe we have been called to, the more insights we have gained into how to go forward in a way that benefits the whole community. One thing we've always realized—we don't do any of this by ourselves. The tremendous support we receive from churches, individuals, businesses, and foundations makes it all possible.

Even as we celebrate our growth and service, the work continues. And now is a good time to reflect on our roots and our vision for the future, as we remember how much our partnership with the community has helped to shape who we are. With your help, we have been able to live up to the values that underpin our work of feeding hungry families in a way that lifts

up their dignity. Your financial contributions have assisted us in feeding large numbers of hungry Knoxvilleans, while also encouraging our spirits. We have taken comfort in knowing that our supporters value our work of creating community across the lines of the diverse people of Knoxville.

Our shared conviction that despite differences in creed, race or ethnic background, and economic circumstances we partake in a common humanity has allowed us to create a space where all can be who they are and be accepted as part of the community. At a time when there is much polarization in the world and sadly even in our own great country, we are reimagining what we can do in our own community, and we pledge to build on what we have begun.

Celebrating Diversity-- Creating Community

FISH Hospitality Pantries, a non-profit organization, is the largest provider of food relief packages to hungry Knoxville, providing food to over 10,000 families (30,000 people) each month in a way that respects their dignity. We opened our first pantry in East Knoxville in 1986. We now operate four pantries in East, South, Northwest and West Knoxville, providing more packages of food than all other Knoxville pantries combined.

People know they are somewhere unique when they step into a FISH Hospitality Pantry. As we established our pantries and built a community base of participation, we developed a culture of creating community. Our pantries became places where people who live in the surrounding neighborhoods could discover their leadership skills and strengthen their capacity to improve their lives.

Our small professional staff relies on several hundred volunteers. This diverse group of people representing different economic backgrounds, religious traditions, and ethnicities staffs the pantries and oversees their operation. This does not happen by chance--over the past 24 years we have been very intentional about community building, engaging the services of a professional community organizer to help bring about these relationships.

We realized some years back that to really create the kind of hospitality (an atmosphere of welcome and acceptance), we wanted in our pantries, we would need to include those who know first hand the struggle for life's necessities. So about a third of our pantry volunteers are people who once came for food and stayed on to help greet pantry guests, assist guests with selection of food items, repack bulk food

products, work in the warehouse, pick up donations, and more. About 200 volunteer monthly, including 100 who volunteer at least three hours each week. Their personal knowledge of hunger gives them insights which ensure our pantry procedures and policies reflect respect for the dignity of every person. One wonderful result of participation in our work is transformation in our volunteers. People develop previously unrecognized skills and leadership qualities. They go back to their families and neighborhoods feeling stronger and more encouraged about life. Many of our volunteers go on to use their newly discovered leadership skills to improve their neighborhoods through other community efforts. We celebrate that we are part of the effort to create true community based upon compassion and justice for everyone.

Abundant Harvest

The 2007 opening of the doors of the FISH Northwest Hospitality Pantry/Food Warehouse ushered in a new era--an era of abundance.

For the first time ever, we had space for the large donations we had previously had to turn away. Each month we had been losing large food donations--like 12,000 pounds of sausage-- because we did not have the facilities to store them.

And just in time, since the economic downturn hit and the expected 300 families per each day the pantry was open almost doubled.

The 8,800 square-foot building located at 122 W. Scott Avenue, with its large storage, cooler, and freezer capacity, meant more food for our pantries in East, South, and West Knoxville, since food could be stored there and transported as needed to the other neighborhood pantries.

In the building's first year we received additional donated food (chicken, cheese, cereal, crackers, pasta, vegetables, and more) valued at more than \$1,400,000. Each year since we have received (and distributed to families in need) donated food valued at \$2,000,000. The additional space has also given us storage for the large purchases of healthful items we have made in order to increase the nutritional value of our food packages.

Later we added shelving to create even more area for storage within the warehouse.

But our abundance soon brought new challenges. Our growing success at finding perishable food donations was far greater than we expected when the new facility was planned and built. By 2009, it became evident that we needed still more freezer and cooler space to receive all of the local and regional donated food offered to us. Our 400 square foot freezer unit (holding up to 24 pallets of frozen foods) and a 400 square foot cooler unit (holding up to 24 pallets of refrigerated foods) were no longer enough. After a year of experiencing loss of food donations because we could not accommodate larger donations of perishables, we decided to raise funds to allow us to expand our freezer capacity.

We launched a "Freezer for Food" campaign which resulted in funding to construct a new three-times larger freezer unit on the west side of our warehouse. It can hold three trailer loads (72 pallets) of frozen food. We then converted the old freezer to a second cooler in order to double our refrigeration space.

In the first year since the freezer became operational we received and distributed additional perishable food donations valued at over \$400,000. This allowed us to offer our guests--many of whom suffer from health problems--more fresh foods with high nutritional value.



“The Main Thing is that our pantries provide an opportunity to be like God--to be united with Him--revealing his compassionate mercy to people who may be feeling the most isolated, the most judged (by themselves and others), the least cared about, and the most defeated by life.

No one can take advantage of us. Providing food without considering who deserves it is to be good to those who do right and wrong alike. This is our highest purpose.

Jim Wright

FISH Hospitality Pantries History

Twenty-seven years ago FISH Hospitality Pantries started with a dream: to feed the multitudes. Inspired by the biblical mandate to feed the hungry, Jim Wright's vision was to try to ensure that every family in the Knoxville community had enough food. The dream come true began in an East Knoxville church basement with a hundred food bags and the realization that if pantries were located closer to housing projects and other areas of concentrated poverty, they would be more accessible to those in need of food assistance.

Up until then FISH had primarily operated as a delivery system, with area churches taking one day a month to answer a hotline and make deliveries to people's homes. But one day when there were not enough volunteers to respond to the hotline calls, Wright invited callers who had transportation or who lived within walking distance to pick up their food at the church pantry. That day he discovered that if people were given the opportunity to visit a pantry near their home, they could find a way to get there, whether by carpool or bus or even on foot.

The East Knoxville FISH Pantry (1986) was the first of three neighborhood pantries established over the next few years to catch the overflow from the delivery system as well as to serve people who may have been turned away from other food pantries. In 1991, the Western Avenue FISH Pantry and the South Knoxville FISH Pantry opened their doors. A fourth neighborhood pantry was located in the Episcopal Church of the Ascension where Wright is on staff as Director of Hunger Ministries.

Wright called the first pantry The Last Resort FISH Pantry, but it soon became the pantry many chose as a first resort because of the hospitality that volunteers extended. That was because Wright insisted on visitors being treated with respect and welcome. There would be no qualifying or invasive questioning. Volunteers were asked to suspend judgment and never attempt to decide whether people met certain criteria or were "deserving" of food.

Although Wright's idea that the way people were treated when they came for food was "as nourishing as the food they received" met with

resistance from some in the community, it resonated with many volunteers and donors so that this ministry has grown tremendously over the years. Now 27 years later FISH Hospitality Pantries serves over 10,000 families (30,000 people) each month.

About 20 years ago, Wright crossed paths with Beth Carroll Hunley, a journalist/ community organizer who was writing about poverty and justice issues and working in East Tennessee rural communities on hunger issues. Wright's vision for hospitality and welcoming was in keeping with Hunley's underpinning conviction (from her Roman Catholic faith) that every person had dignity. They forged a partnership. Wright supported and worked with Hunley as she organized five rural pantry coalitions (Sevier County Food Ministries in 1992, Claiborne Hunger Ministry in 1992, Scott County Emergency Food Assistance in 1993, Blount County Community Food Connection in 1994, and Campbell County Food/ Life Services in 1994), and FISH provided the first one hundred food bags for each of the ministries on their opening days.

As Hunley was learning the ins and outs of getting a pantry up and running, Wright was learning from her about the value of interfaith community organizing as she brought together diverse sectors of the communities into coalitions that would serve all. As Wright began to see the power in interfaith dialogue and the relationships forged, creating diverse participation and leadership, he was eager to bring this model to the three Knoxville pantries.

In the FISH Neighborhood Pantries, following the FISH Network tradition, each church took responsibility for staffing the pantry one day a month. In the rural counties, people from various churches were working side by side and serving on the same day. Although this sprang from necessity, Wright saw its value. Likewise, Hunley was impressed by the fact that some of the people who volunteered at the East Knoxville Pantry were people who first came for food. So as she organized the coalitions in the rural counties she made sure to include the hungry, going a bit farther to see that the voices of people who struggled for basic necessities had a voice in the new coalitions with opportunities

to be part of the leadership. Together, Wright and Hunley were learning about the power of including the materially poor in the solutions.

Unfortunately, some people in the rural congregations wanted to be very strict about who could get food and how often they could get it. When Hunley, following Wright's hospitality model, refused to ask invasive questions about income and spending habits, some church members refused to join their coalitions. Without enough church volunteers, Hunley came to rely on the help of people coming in for food. The pantries needed their sensitivity in order to be authentic in treating people according to the basic faith value that every person has dignity. So the whole experience was an awakening to a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

By the mid-nineties Wright and Hunley began to integrate this inclusive, interfaith community model into the work in Knoxville. FISH contracted with Genesis, the non-profit organization that Hunley directed, to provide organizing assistance, going back into the communities where the three Knoxville pantries were located to build a base of participation and support through listening and identifying people who shared values for making sure their neighbors were fed in a way that would respect their dignity. As they were developing leadership from churches in each of the communities, they held monthly steering meetings where the diverse leadership offered insights and strategies, and made decisions for improving their service to the hungry families of their communities. Ultimately, there was strong neighborhood ownership of the pantries which is still present today.

In the mid-nineties the organization was renamed FISH Hospitality Pantries to reflect the spirit of welcome and inclusiveness. Over the years the leadership has fostered a culture of inclusiveness inviting the participation of volunteers across religious traditions, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, and economic circumstances which remains at the heart of the Hospitality Pantries.

by Leslie Sholly

Soon the children will come...

And Elisabeth Myers (“Lissy” to those who know her) will be ready for them. She began hours ago, carefully washing and drying the apples before placing them in the white bags the smallest guests at FISH Hospitality Pantries have come to rely on.

It is still a little while before the Northwest Pantry’s doors will open, but Lissy has already prepared dozens of the BOOST bags that will be given out later this morning, and she’s started on the ones that will be distributed tomorrow at the FISH East and South Hospitality Pantries. Earlier, when she added the apples, (along with the macaroni and cheese, yogurt, string cheese, and granola and milk and raisins), she checked to make sure every bag was decorated with a sticker—the Cat in the Hat, maybe, or perhaps a dinosaur or a tiger or a flower.

Soon her husband, Joe, will carry another batch down the stairs from the balcony where the BOOST supplies are stored to a larger cooler. Lissy has been married to Joe for 54 years. They both volunteer at the Northwest Pantry—he helps oversee warehouse operations, while Lissy manages the BOOST program.

Lissy always knew she wanted to volunteer when she retired from her job as a professional seamstress. She has brought the same focus and concentration that contributed to the tiny stitches on her lovely creations—the same artistry, the same sense of balance, the same aim towards perfection.

As the time for retirement drew near, she asked a friend where she volunteered. “The first day I volunteered I knew it was the right place. It was” (she struggles to find the words to describe her experience) “unbelievable. I went home and told my husband, ‘Honey, you need to come with me.’” Joe, newly retired as well (from Rohm and Haas), and reluctant to give up his Tuesday and Thursday golf games, agreed to go with her the next time. “After five

years, he’s still here,” she says.

Managing the BOOST program and volunteering at the Pantry has become almost a full time job for Lissy Myers. When asked about her dedication, she responds, placing her hand on her chest, “It is here in my heart.”

She shares her own story. “I know hunger. I’ve seen people starve to death.” She is referring to the time she spent at Gakowa, a Communist concentration camp where Ethnic Germans were interned during World II. Lissy, of German descent, was born in Yugoslavia where her grandparents had migrated for land opportunities. Her father and grandfather had a thriving hemp business.

Lissy was almost five years old when the war began, and her father, an ethnic German, was forced to serve in the German Army. Later, the Soviets rounded up all the women between the ages of 18 and 35, which included her mother and her aunts, and put them on a train to a labor camp in Russia. Lissy and her nine-year-old brother were left with her maternal grandmother. Soon after, they were taken to Gakowa where “day by day I watched my grandmother grow weaker, as she gave her food to us.” After her grandmother died, her father’s mother cared for Lissy and her brother along with her six cousins. “My four-year-old cousin and I would cry from hunger. We had maybe a slice of bread each day, something like cornbread hard as a rock, and a bowl of water which they called soup.”

Her grandmother couldn’t bear to eat her own food while her young grandchildren were hungry. For the second time in her young life, she watched a grandmother die. In the meantime, her father had been taken prisoner by the Americans.

Now her sixteen-year-old cousin, Liz, took care of them, eight all together. “After almost three years, my cousin led us on an escape. Because there were always people



PEACEMAKING: A MOSAIC

Can we engage our own culture as we exercise our ministry when we choose an activity for “the common good?” The FISH ministry is focused on feeding the needy and this is clearly a good thing, but it is much more. At FISH we work closely with others of like mind in an atmosphere of growing mutual respect.

As we work shoulder-to-shoulder with our coworkers directly serving those in need, the availability of this team of volunteers permits us to share abundance, and to recall the miracles of loaves and fishes. Beyond this we recognize ourselves as being part of a mosaic of individuals immersed in and reflecting God’s love, all with growing respect and affection for those we serve as well as for those we serve with.

Dick Strehlow

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coming and going, there was a grapevine, and through this, we learned that my father had been released by the Americans.

“We walked at night in the dark, and hid in grasses and fields during the day, because if the Russian soldiers had caught us, they would have shot us.

“When we crossed the border to Hungary, my father was waiting for us.”

After Lissy and her brother, Phillip, were reunited with their father in Hungary, they made their way to Germany through Austria, her father finding work along the way on farms. For his work, they would be allowed to sleep in a barn at night and were given fruits to eat. Lissy remembers the first farm where they stayed –it had many orchards, and she was given an apricot.

“I can still taste the apricot.”

On Mondays, Lissy and Joe pick up milk for BOOST at Mayfield Dairy. Wednesdays she shops at Kroger. Mondays and Fridays she visits EarthFare. Tuesdays and Thursdays she is at the Pantry. Sundays, she attends Mass at St. John Neumann Catholic Church. A life-long

Catholic, and the child of devout Catholics, Lissy recalls how they were not allowed to pray at Gakowa. But when the guards were not around, their grandmother took them aside to say prayers.

Lissy and Joe met when Joe was a young soldier stationed in Germany. Lissy didn’t speak much English, and Joe didn’t speak German, so they dated with a dictionary. Now they are parents to two sons and devoted grandparents to two grandsons in North Carolina. They never miss a birthday, special school event, or family vacation. Most summer Saturdays, they relax on their boat with friends. They love to travel. This year they went on a cruise, and to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, they went back to Germany and traveled to Black Forest where they had gone on their wedding trip.

On a recent BOOST shopping trip to the Farragut Kroger, Lissy spotted a family stranded by their car across the street. She and Joe turned around and went back. The family spoke little English. It turned out they were from Romania originally, but they had come to Tennessee from California, because the man

had been promised a job; but after they got here, the job did not pan out. In the meantime, his mother, who was still in California, had become very ill, and they wanted to return. Because of the diversity of the volunteer pool at the FISH Northwest Hospitality Pantry, Lissy knew other Romanians, and she was able to put them in touch with people from the Romanian community here in Knoxville.

Later the little ones will bounce into the front room and peer up at the greeting desk. It is the same scene every Tuesday and Thursday. Their expectant faces will break into smiles as they open their bags and spot some of their favorites—string cheese, yogurt pushups. Some will squeal with delight when they find little baggies of grapes. Many of them are too young to know that what is in their bags is really good for them. They just know how it tastes. Some of the little ones will picnic in the front room while their mothers shop in the service room.

Lissy will be watching, and pointing out their sweet responses. “I can’t stand to think of a child being hungry,” she says. “Here is a place I can feed the hungry child.”

Bread and Art



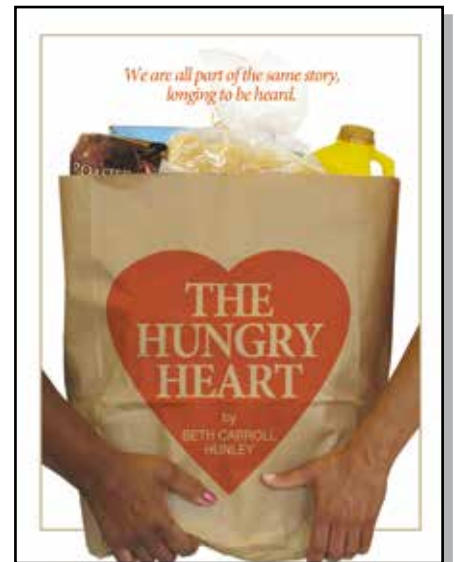
In 2010 we launched Hospitality Pantries Bread and Art, creating a performance piece incorporating drama, dance, music, and song based on the collected stories of the people who work at FISH Hospitality Pantries and the guests who come to the pantry for food.

The very process of collecting these stories was empowering for participants, many of whom had never had a chance to tell their stories, to be heard. We chose drama as a tool for social change because of its power to touch people’s hearts and minds, helping viewers to connect with our common humanity.

The Hungry Heart tells the story of our work in combating hunger, poverty, and racism. It illustrates the story of the creation of community across race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and economic circumstances and language barriers. In the summer of 2011, Hospitality Pantries partnered with

The Hungry Heart tells the story of our work in combating hunger, poverty, and racism.

the Carpetbag Theatre to produce the piece as part of the “Homegrown in the Garden” Project in Knoxville. We have developed vignette pieces from the play that can be used both for professional theatre and for community performances to tell the stories of the hunger and poverty encountered by those who live and work in our area. In doing so we have a vehicle to take beyond the pantry into the wider arena to sensitize and to illustrate our value for combating society’s tendency to oppress and devalue human beings who may be members of minorities.



Love & Joy at the East Pantry

It's Monday afternoon at the East Knoxville FISH Hospitality Pantry, almost closing time, but right now action prevails. Although they've already served several hundred families today, the volunteers are still calling out cheerful greetings to newly-arrived guests. Gospel music is playing in the background, and the Monday Coordinator, Wilma Stacy, is bustling around, so busy she hardly has time to talk.

Wilma has volunteered here almost 20 years, and she's not the only longtime volunteer—there are others here like Josephine Thompson and Pat Johnson, who are working the desk today. Wilma finds a few minutes between chores to offer some words that speak to her dedication. "I've been here for close to twenty years. I just keep coming, because I love it. I just love it."

It was her husband, George, who brought Wilma into the ministry all those years ago.

Recently retired, he began volunteering with friends Herbert Donaldson and Dennis Banks. Their pastor at Logan Temple A.M.E. Zion and his wife were interested in the pantry and suggested at a church breakfast that the three of them should spend some of their "off time" as volunteers. George became the pantry council treasurer, and drove the truck for food pickups. In those early days, Wilma rode the truck with George. But once she came into the pantry she found a place of her own.

While Wilma steps away to thank a guest for coming in, Michael Greene, who has been working at the pantry for five years and is responsible for the Gospel music, takes up the conversation. Michael, a member of Greater Bush Grove Baptist Church in Mechanicsville, says he's here because of Wilma. "She's like an angel," he says, both in in action and appearance. "She has a glow," he says.

When Wilma slows down for a minute and

hears what Michael said about her, she says, "Oh, mercy! That makes me feel good, but I come here because of them. They make me happy, and the guests they bring me joy. They bring me joy every Monday. The people that you meet, and the things they say to you, they are so happy, so gracious. What can I say but come back?"

The East Pantry is where the FISH Hospitality neighborhood pantries got their start, and the spirit of neighborhood is strong here. Although many churches are represented, people seem to know everyone coming in. "And I think that the guests feel good about coming here," Wilma says. "I think it's because we don't ask questions. We tell them to come in."

She brings up the morning meeting held before the doors open, which she believes sets the tone for the day. "We speak about love," she says. "We tell the volunteers to love these people. To love them like you love

BLESSINGS & BECOMING

Being at the FISH Hospitality Pantry has truly changed my life in ways I never knew were possible.

I always felt like I was doing the right things. I was raised that way, but I never knew the kind of love that flows from the Pantry, to the Pantry, and around the Pantry, from all walks of life.



I had a dream years ago. I saw all of these different people walking. I thought after the

dream I was going to be a minister's wife—I was in love with an up and coming minister at the time. So it made perfect sense to me, but that didn't happen. It was not God's plan. I didn't understand at the time, but as life went on, I worked hard, went to church, raised my son, loved my family.

My job let me go. I didn't know what I was going to do. I looked out my kitchen window the next morning, and it came to me that God is my source. My only income at that time was unemployment, so in looking for ways to save and survive, I found the FISH Hospitality Pantry, the place where the line of people were welcomed and treated with dignity and respect. We were offered the items of food. I was humbled. I had never been treated this way at a food pantry.

Once inside as a volunteer, I saw firsthand what the main focus of this Pantry was—treating people with dignity and respect: food of course, but they wanted people to receive

the kindness that they deserve, and in turn the people gave back, the same if not more. And even though I had some rough times and difficult days at the pantry in the beginning, because I—me--being in my own way of growth, and not understanding some things--conflict can be a healthy thing only if you learn from it, and I wanted to continue to be a part of this wonderful place that blesses me with much more than food.

I've heard people say, well you can't change the world, but you can change the way you think about yourself and the people around you, the people who are less fortunate than you—you can change your community, and that's a start. I would not change any of my experiences that I've had at the FISH Pantry, because for the first time in my life, I truly feel like I am slowly, hopefully, but surely becoming the person that God wants me to be.

Kathy Cannon



SOUTH PANTRY'S SANDY MONDAY

Sandy Monday is South Knoxville to the core. Her family home—built by her great-grandfather Joseph Harris—stood at the corner of Young High Pike and Chapman Highway, only a half mile from the FISH Hospitality Pantry in Vestal where she's volunteered as the Wednesday coordinator for 22 years.

Volunteering at the pantry was not so much a conscious decision for Sandy as an unexpected gift. When the pantry was just getting going, Jim Wright was calling on area ministers to recruit volunteers. Sandy's pastor—she attends Beulah United Methodist Church—couldn't attend a meeting about the pantry, so he asked Sandy to take his place to find out what was going on.

"I left with a key to the building, and I'm still there 22 years later," Sandy said. But she soon realized it was a way she could live her faith. "We'd just had this sermon about feeding the hungry, and it was something I could do. I didn't have to be a missionary, and go to a different country to make a difference."

Working at FISH helped her to see and appreciate the many gifts she had already. She did a lot of lifting and walking up and down steps, while so many pantry guests were burdened with physical handicaps and illnesses; and she began to appreciate more deeply her good health and physical strength. Another gift she developed over the years was compassion. Recently, when a fellow volunteer mentioned that he had lost his compassion on two occasions, Sandy reassured him, saying that you always get it back. She smiles when she talks about the children, whose "faces just light up when they see the BOOST bags," and reflects on the goodness of the people who come for food. "There is a definite need for a food pantry, especially in this area," she says, citing the proximity of low income housing developments and other concentrated areas of poverty.

Over the years her perspective has changed as she has understood more deeply how people struggle. In the beginning, "I thought anybody can be poor--be born into a poor family, but they can get out of it." But she says she better

understands what people are up against as she has gotten to know the stories of people first hand--physical handicaps, lack of educational opportunities.

Over the years, Sandy had been developing another major gift that would change her. Hers was a musical household. Her father, a detective with the Knoxville police force by day, played the clarinet and the saxophone in the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra. His favorite way to unwind after his 3 to 11 shift was to play the piano. So it wasn't uncommon for Sandy and her two sisters to be awakened in bed at night to hear their father's music.

Unlike her sisters, Sandy said she didn't seem to have the musical touch. It was her husband, Charles, who bought her a guitar at a yard sale for \$15 and encouraged her to learn to play. "He just thought I could and that I should."

It was also Charles who got her to eventually play in a band. "I was going up once a week to the Colonial Heights Hardware Store where I was jamming with a group of people. He told us, 'This is crazy. You all are just sitting playing to each other. You ought to be out playing somewhere.'"

"There was about five of us that got together and started playing and we started out going to nursing homes and it got bigger and bigger. Then we made a CD and so it grew from there."

Since then, Sandy has played rhythm guitar, fiddle, and bass with a number of bands. These days she mostly sticks to the upright bass, playing bluegrass and Gospel in Robinson, North Carolina; Townsend; and Maryville with the Old Timers Band.

Despite all the blessings Sandy counts in her life, she has known tragedy. Her first husband was killed in Vietnam. Her baby daughter was only five weeks at the time. She recalls what a sad and scary time it was. But she quickly

WHAT DO YOU "GET" AT THE FISH PANTRY?

If you are a volunteer, you will receive the gift of watching the eyes of a child light up as he or she gets an individual bag of nutritious snacks, complete with a sticker on the bag!

You will see the eyes of a young mother fill with tears as she realizes she will be able to feed her family that day.

You will see the amazement on the faces of new guests when they realize there is nothing they have to prove, no story, no ID, nothing. Just go through the line and pick out groceries.

You will hear one guest tell another that "this is the nicest place to be" *Nancy Butler*

turns back to the blessings, remembering an old song: "Count your blessings. Count them one by one. See what God has done."

And she believes the pantry has been one of God's gifts to her. "It's certainly what's kept me in there all these years. . . . It's not something I take lightly," she said. "Doing for others--that's what you're supposed to do. I would like to do great things, and one of my prayers is God, show me what you want me to do."

"It does not have to be a great big thing: it can be a little thing of going on Wednesday. But it's not just about food-- we're giving hope or friendship to the ones coming in," connecting with people, Sandy says: "It's personal."

Listening to My Inner Voice: Finding Solid Ground

I was born in Guatemala, I lived with my father from the age of nine months until five years. He came to the United States in 1967 and left me in my grandmother's care.

On February 5, 1976, there was a 7.5 magnitude earthquake in Guatemala. I have not forgotten the sound that woke me up that morning. I remember waiting for the ceiling to fall on my head at our house. Thank God everyone at home was all right. Sadly, over 23,000 people died and thousands were injured or homeless. We had no running water or electricity. We had to get water from neighbors who had wells. We had to walk for a about half a mile to get water which was rationed so everyone could have some.

Within days of the earthquake, my dad arrived in Guatemala. He hired a lawyer to accelerate the paperwork process that would allow us entry to the U.S. (which had already begun before the earthquake) and on April 2, 1976 my sister, Alicia, my three-month-old niece, Nydia, and I arrived in Brooklyn, New York. I was 13 years old.

I cried a lot because of the culture shock. Suddenly I was in a country where it was colder than Guatemala. I could not communicate with my neighbors or classmates--not even my step-sister and brothers--because I did not speak English. I wanted to go back home but I could not.

I was enrolled in junior high school the week of my arrival. I had one bi-lingual class in school; the rest of my classes were in English. I used to stay after school so I could learn the language as soon as possible. I did not like being made fun of. I remember one day I went to the movies with my family. I tried to tell my next door neighbor. I said: "I am going to the movie yesterday." He laughed out loud and would not stop making fun about my accent and for speaking backwards from that day forward.

I was determined, so determined to learn that I would go to the library after school so I could find books that were available in Spanish and English. I would read them at the same time so I could learn fast and I did. In 1977 when I started high school I no longer needed to be in a bi-lingual program. I forgot to mention that my grandmother got her visa before I did, but she refused to leave me behind. She would always tell me that she wanted to see her children before she died. She arrived in the U.S. on July 1, 1977. On July 4, she made her last

meal. She passed away that night. She was 77 years old. My dad could not get over her death. That year he went back to Guatemala alone. He passed away in 1990 at the age of 57.

My father loved children. If families could not pay for their children's matriculation fees he would pay for them. He would also pay for their books. Whenever we were eating at a restaurant, as soon as he saw a child looking for leftovers, he would call him (I only remember seeing boys) over and give him money so he did not have to get anyone's leftovers. My grandmother always said that if there was food for two, it would be enough for four.

I think I am drawn to the pantry because of my childhood experiences. I know what it is like not to be able to communicate because of a language barrier; that's why I love the teaching model (You Teach Me/I Teach You) at the pantry. New immigrants and native English speakers learn from each other. All I do is help facilitate the process. For new immigrants, learning English is a matter of survival; for native English speakers, learning Spanish shows acceptance and a willingness to integrate with us. I am grateful for that and very happy to share my native language with them.

I don't know what it is like to be hungry but I learned from my grandmother and dad to share with others and to treat them with dignity. That's why I love the pantry's core values. I also know what it's like to be discriminated against. I was told by my first grade teacher not to use the name *Cosigua* because it was a "nombre de indio" (an Indian name). I have also been told that I should be stepped on like a roach for having Indian blood. That's why I am accepting of others and believe in inclusion. That is why I am working for immigration reform.

I love attending Community School because I am learning about community organizing and how to be a great leader and organizer. I am getting valuable tools that have been useful during my advocacy work with new immigrants. I now have a better understanding about why people are poor, how power is used, and the importance of building relationships.

Being a volunteer, a student and a teacher at the FISH Pantry has been a very fulfilling experience. I moved to Knoxville in November, 2011. I learned about the pantry from Barbara, who manages the Community Chest on Central, and one morning when I had nothing planned something that I can't explain came

over me; from the moment I awoke I wanted to go to the pantry. I listened to my inner voice.

I felt at home with the warm welcome I received from everyone. I immediately noticed the diversity in the room and I liked it. I knew by the end of the day that I was where I needed to be.

The time I have spent at the pantry has been very rewarding. The energy in the room is positive. It is evident that the leadership and the volunteers are warm and friendly. I like that the guests are treated with respect. They get to choose the food they want. What I love most is that no one who arrives after the 1:00 p.m. closing time is denied food.



Teaching Spanish and English on Fridays has been fun. It is great to see everyone's determination to learn. I am delighted to teach and to learn. The Pantry Leadership has created a safe and welcoming space for everyone. It is evident because people feel safe to express their needs other than learning English/Spanish including what makes them sad or happy. The best part is that we work as a team and together we come up with solutions to address some of the needs that come up during class.

I am glad I listened to my inner guide that Thursday morning and showed up at the FISH pantry instead of staying home or going shopping.

Emma Cosigua

LemonAid Stand

In the Midst of the Long, Hot Summer—A Refreshing Story of LemonAid

Against the backdrop of history, Damon Rodefer, 14, leans deeper into the conversation about what it means to be a leader. Damon has been spending the week at the Junior National Young Leaders Conference in Washington, D.C., where he joined other highly acclaimed students from across the country to participate in workshops and discussions exploring the qualities of historic American leaders and social advocates.

Before Damon left Knoxville, plans were already underway for the 5th annual LemonAid Stand which Damon created at age ten to benefit FISH Hospitality Pantries. The LemonAid stand began four years ago after the young entrepreneur had collected food for the East Knoxville FISH Hospitality Pantry along with his Episcopal School of Knoxville classmates earlier in the year. When he visited the pantry, he was moved by all the people who were there hoping to get something good for their families. At the time Damon said, "It hurt to see so many hungry people," and when he celebrated his birthday, he asked his parents, Jimmy and Shelley Rodefer, if he could donate his birthday money to FISH Hospitality Pantries.

But with the hungry families still much on

his mind, Damon wanted to do more. Like many of the children who volunteer with their schools or religious groups, he saw beyond the sadness of the situation and realized that through FISH Hospitality he could actually do something to help struggling families. So Damon asked his parents if he could have a lemonade stand for FISH.

The Rodefers allowed Damon to locate his first LemonAid Stand at his dad's office, the Rodefer, Moss Accounting Firm on Mabry Hood. Gathering some of his school friends and armed with his Papaw's secret homemade lemonade recipe, he raised \$4,500.

Damon and his friends have kept up the yearly tradition and the contributions have steadily grown, last year reaching over \$20,000. Damon's stand now includes corporate sponsors as well as individual donors. And since the second year, Damon and friends have worked a second stand at Clayton Bank in downtown Knoxville.

In addition to presenting FISH Hospitality Pantries with checks each year, Damon has lived his calling to care about others by volunteering with his parents at the FISH Northwest pantry. He has also been sensitized to poverty in other communities

during his travels. During a family trip to Belize last summer, Damon was struck by the contrast between the severe poverty--with many people living in shipping cartons and abandoned tractor trailers--and the beautiful villas and resort areas. One incident that impressed him deeply was seeing young children standing naked by a rock where their mother was washing their only clothes in the river. He couldn't help but compare what he saw to his own opportunity-packed life. These experiences keep Damon committed to the poor of his own community.

At 14, Damon says he has not outgrown LemonAid stands. Although his role may change in terms of recruiting, overseeing, and providing training for other youngsters who would like to make such a positive impact in their community, he remains committed to FISH Hospitality Pantries. Damon says he has never thought of himself as a role model for others; he was only thinking about what he himself could do to help people who were having such a hard time.

But Damon has been an inspiration and an energizing force to many in the community. Since that first year, a number of church youth groups have staffed LemonAid stands in public places like Earth Fare and Butler and Bailey Market. Additionally, a number of restaurants have participated as well each summer, offering lemonade to diners for a donation to FISH Hospitality Pantries.

Just back from his D.C. trip, where he engaged in exercises aimed at developing the students' leadership skills and plans of action to effect change in their own communities, Damon is renewed in his resolve to continue the climb towards ensuring children and families in the Knoxville Community have the food they need to thrive.



Damon Rodefer, fourth from the left, with his LemonAid Crew

NEW PARKING LOT

With as many as 700 families visiting our Northwest pantry each day it is open, parking had become a chronic problem for our guests and volunteers and surrounding businesses. So many of our guests are burdened with health issues and handicaps that make it difficult for them when they have to park far away and walk great distances with groceries. Many more are mothers with small children to carry. Over the years we have observed the agitation and even panic of some when they are unable to find parking space nearby our pantry adding to the already stressful time for those in need of food for their families. Faced with this dilemma, we began raising funds to purchase two properties across from the Northwest Pantry.

The “Parking for Food” Project is now completed, and we are all so grateful to the many individuals and foundations who generously contributed. Many guests have told us how much they appreciate our efforts to make their needed food relief more easily accessible. Already, we have experienced much less vehicle congestion and other related parking issues that were chronically stressful problems for all of us up until just a few weeks ago. The new parking lot may prove to contribute more to peace around the Scott Avenue pantry than we could have ever imagined.

Canopied Pavilion

Last September we completed construction on our canopied pavilion on the east end of our Northwest Pantry/Warehouse Facility to provide shelter, in keeping with our values for treating our guests with respect and increasing our pantries accessibility. No longer must our early morning guests stand in rain, cold wind, or summer heat. The pavilion also provides a safe waiting place out of the way of traffic.

Often by the time the pantry doors open the line of hungry people stretches across the parking lot, around the corner, down the graveled alley alongside the building, and all the way to our rear parking lot. In addition to the coffee and water we already take outside to those waiting in line, the canopied pavilion expresses more deeply our value for and commitment to welcoming the hungry poor with hospitality.

The pavilion also provides cover for the overflow of donated perishable fruits and vegetables.

I WANT TO SUPPORT THE PROGRAMS OF FISH HOSPITALITY PANTRIES

Please make checks payable to FISH Hospitality Pantries, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Donation Enclosed

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ADDRESS

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Charge my credit card

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DISCOVER

ACCOUNT NUMBER

EXP. DATE

SIGNATURE



I am interested in volunteering at FISH Hospitality Pantries

FISH Hospitality Pantries

800 Northshore Drive
Knoxville, TN 37919

Visit FISHpantry.org to make a donation online.



WOMEN'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL, launched in 2008, discovers and call forth talents and abilities from diverse women—African American, Latina, and Anglo—from churches and neighborhoods, both low-income and middle-class; provides training in acting together to improve situations in their neighborhoods and communities; and creates community among participants across denominational, class, ethnic, and economic lines by building relationships around common values and interests.



MOSAIC, our multi-cultural leaders' institute, is a vehicle for dismantling racism, developing leadership, and building community. The Mosaic program aims to dispel prejudices and misconceptions and build good working relationships among volunteers from diverse ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. It focuses on Relational Empowerment—building an understanding in our Latino, African-American, and Anglo leaders that together we can address problems like hunger.



YOU TEACH ME/I TEACH YOU, a special class for pantry guests who want to learn English and for pantry volunteers who want to learn Spanish, began in 2011. This informal course—which has become very popular with our guests—develops stronger communication across cultures. Because many participants have already been bringing their children along, we have been developing a children's language enrichment curriculum. The language and culture exchange is a gateway to a deeper connection with the other.



FISH Hospitality Pantries

800 Northshore Drive
Knoxville, TN 37919

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fishpantry.org

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“CAN A KID GET A BAG?”

Jonathan, one of our younger guests, asked us this several years ago at our Northwest Pantry...

We assumed he had his eye on more of the items children particularly enjoy like macaroni and cheese or that maybe he wanted to fill a bag with some of the sweets volunteers had been handing out to make the experience of children who accompanied their parents to the pantry a good one. But when we allowed him to go through the line, he filled his bag with milk and cheese and bread and vegetables. And then we learned that he was accompanying adults who were caring for him and his younger brothers while his parents were working.

His question set us to thinking, though, about how we should respond to children, and it reminded us all that they are hungry children. That sowed the seeds for our BOOST program, and we began to talk about the idea of a special bag for children, a individual kid-sized bag just for them that would have tasty, kid-friendly foods but high in nutrition, the kind of things we would buy for our own children and our grandchildren. It would contain fruit, whole grain cereals and pastas, and dairy items like yogurt, cheese, and milk—foods to grow and develop strong bodies, bones, and brains.

We began to see that not only did we have an opportunity to assist the parents who were visiting our pantries as they struggled to take care of this most basic need of their children, perhaps we had a responsibility: that somehow these littlest guests, the children of our community, are the children of us all. We knew when we launched the program that there were many hungry children in our area. But statistics are more compelling when we see them as actual people instead of numbers.

So we came up with BOOST, an attempt to boost the nutritional status of the next generation. And today we can answer with a resounding YES to the question: Can a kid get a bag?

Since June 2009, each child who has visited our Northwest Hospitality Pantry has received his or her own child-sized food bag filled with nutritious, kid-friendly items. We began the program with the support of a local foundation as a pilot program and after a year with their continued support we were able to expand the program and extend it to our East and South Knoxville pantries.

The children’s response to their bags has sensitized us all to the reality of childhood hunger. We have watched with our own eyes the delight of these little ones as they tear into their bags and discover some of their favorite items like grapes, apples, strawberries, and we have heard their squeals of happiness, and we have witnessed the genuine happiness of the parents as they watch their children consume these healthy items.

So what is in our KIDS BOOST bags? We have put the burden on ourselves to adhere to the strictest of standards. Our BOOST bags contain only ingredients that are good for children. They do not contain any dyes, artificial additives or fructose corn syrup. We purchase only the highest quality of food. Our Kids BOOST program is unique in the quality of the foods we put in our bags. We know with confidence that everything we are giving our young guests is absolutely good for them.

Having begun to serve our youngest guests in a more personal way has created a bond between them and our volunteers. We are as grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the BOOST program as the children and their parents are. We know we are making a difference and are excited to bring this experience to other children and volunteers.



Three Principles of Hospitality

- Everyone should share in and celebrate the earth’s bounty.
- The hungry themselves decide how often they need help with food.
- Relationships across lines transform the community and will ultimately help end hunger.

Three Goals of a Hospitality Pantry

- To prevent hunger and ensure adequate nutrition.
- To respect the dignity and privacy of our guests by welcoming them rather than judging them.
- To create a place where diverse people build community based on compassion and justice.