

Interfaith Food Pantry Network Award to Notre Dame
By Beth Vecchio

Hello, I am Beth Vecchio. Firstly, thank you to Carolyn, the guys in the warehouse, the volunteers who organize the shelves, Allison, Katie, Joanne, the Board of Directors, and all the people who help this beautiful organization with the distribution of food to all who need it.

It is my great honor to receive this award on behalf of our pastor, Father Paddy O-Donovan, and the 90 ministers of The Notre Dame Food Rescue Ministry. Some of our leaders are here today. I want to introduce Patty Gant, Mary McGovern, Kathleen Beck, and Patrice Barry. These women said YES when they were asked to lead a particular arm of our food rescue organization. Those with whom they serve collectively give over 300 hours each week to help provide food to the hungry.

A bit of background....on March 11, my job sent me home, saying they would see me in two weeks. After one week, I realized we would not be going back for a very long time. So I asked God, "What should I do?" and I heard the word FOOD....loud and clear.

I had always admired food rescue projects, and I was taught never to waste food. So, I started to ask local bakeries, groceries, convenience stores, etc., if they would be willing to give us their end-of-day discards. It turned out that most were joyful at the prospect of their food going to folks who could really use it. Almost all of them commented on how sad it was that they had been dumping it daily in the garbage!

I sat in on the daily routines of several agencies in our local area to see how they managed the intake of the large amounts of food and how they distributed it to the clients. It became apparent that we could do our best work by assisting the established agencies. So we made sandwiches for The Mental Health Association's visits to the folks in the hotels and the homeless. In addition, we roasted turkeys and provided 100 full Thanksgiving Day meals to those in need last year. Our fresh and frozen turkey drive was very successful, and all the clients of IFPN who wanted a turkey received one!

When the pantry told us they needed to supply the low-income and shut-in seniors with home-cooked healthy meals, six women began to meet twice weekly to shop and cook for this project under the guidance of Katie from IFPN.

We asked our parishioners to donate non-perishables to our drive-thru drop-off drives held each month during COVID. We asked folks to drop food in a contactless manner at my van, our church, or at the food pantry, itself and we made several trips each week to the warehouse at IFPN. Unfortunately, the churches were closed, so the donations were way down, but the blessed people at Notre Dame kept it going with continued robust weekly donations for over a year! Our tradition of providing food at Notre Dame goes way back to the '90s when Notre Dame and a few other churches were instrumental in establishing the Interfaith Food Pantry.

While we are very humbled by this award, I must speak for the rest of the ministry this evening when I say that we saw the need and answered the call to the best of our abilities. I suppose that is what we are all meant to do. And we will continue.

Thank you, and good night.