

The Family Basket Project at the Shrine of the Sacred Heart

Several members of the Charismatic Renewal, especial Juan Gonzalez and the leaders Juan Melendez and Javier Alvarez noted that many members of the parish community had lost their jobs and a good number of these were undocumented and unable to find relief through the normal channels. The people were in need of food. This growing concern had also been noticed by members of the Parish Council, especially, Alex Taliadoroes and Carola Cerezo-Allen.

The Parish Church had already been closed for a few weeks. In the mean time we were also receiving news that not a few members of the parish were falling ill to the covid-19 virus. Some members of the parish were not only financially in need but were also trying to manage this sickness.

In the midst of growing financial uncertainty, we recognized that the parish had to respond, at least with a gesture of support. Several zoom meetings were held to determine the contents of a Parish Family Basket. At first, we calculated that the cost each basket would be about \$68.51, without counting assembly and transportation. The parish would later seek to recover some of the expenses. We moved forward, trusting in the Holy Spirit and the generosity of parishioners and friends of Sacred Heart. We also counted on the active participation of so many volunteers ready to handle the work for the sake of those in need.

The contents of the original basket included 15 food items as following: Cooking Oil 2.8l, Coffee 2lbs 6oz, Flour 8lb, Beans 10lb, Rice 10lb, Sugar 4lb, Soup 3lb 2oz, Diced Tomatoes 6lb 6oz, Pasta 2lb, Salt 1lb 10oz, Tuna 4lb 2.5oz, Apples 5, Potatoes 10lb, Carrots 10lb, Onions 10lb. We also included (1) a rosary, (2) prayer card, (3) information sheet on additional food distribution sites, (4) locations for covid-19 testing, and (5) a Divine Mercy prayer Card. The real cost per basket was about \$69.56.

Juan Melendez rented a U-Haul truck on two occasions and more than 10 parishioners with pick-up trucks and other vehicles transported the goods to the Church, unloading them and carried them up the main stairs. There were two main purchases, twelve all together. The original purchase to create 250 baskets was for about \$17,390.00. Later, as donations from parishioners poured in, \$15,950.74 was used for the second 250 baskets. Monica Zevallos created 76 more baskets with the donations of food that kept arriving, so that the total number of baskets reached about 576.

Creating individual baskets within the Church was a mammoth chore. Volunteers using face coverings and gloves assembled each basket prayerfully remembering those in need. The number of people in the Church had to be kept to 10 or less. There were many volunteer shifts throughout the duration of the project. The Church benches were used as the staging place to organize each of the family baskets. Especially noteworthy was the task of opening the 300 sacks of carrots, potatoes and onions each weighing 50 lbs. They were subdivided into 10 lb. bags of each. These volunteers should be especially blessed for their patience. The 2,500 apples were also separated and bagged for each family.

Hever Leonzo and Liz Mora created an “Excel Data Base” to register the families. A team of more than 20 drivers over a period of 2 weeks picked up the baskets in the Church and delivered them to the home of each family. A phone call was made to confirm the delivery and once near the residence a second call was made to notify the family that the basket was being placed at their door step. No direct contact was made with the families. The Capuchin brothers: Br. Michael Herlihey, Br. Joseph Morton and Br. Edgar Pereira also assisted in loading and distributing the family baskets.

We estimated that the cost of the original 500 was to be \$ 34,780.00. However, parishioners contributed some of the food that was included directly into the baskets, so the final cost dropped to: \$33,340.74. Also, parishioners donated enough food to create 76 more Family Baskets.

As of June 1st, 2020, we have received \$29,645.12 in donations. We are only \$3,695.62 short. A financial report is on the parish website www.sacredheartdc.org

Thank you for your kindness and helpfulness. So many parishioners and friends have contributed to this project that it would be difficult to name each one individually. Some have asked to remain anonymous.

May God bless your family and reward your generosity.

Fr. Emilio Biosca, OFM Cap
Pastor Sacred Heart Church