

## Fishes and Loaves: Food Buying Club Brings Fresh Produce to Hazelwood and Glen-Hazel

By Katie Hores

For the past few years, a successful service by the name of Fishes and Loaves Cooperative Ministries (FLCM) has provided residents of Hazelwood and some parts of Glen-Hazel with non-perishable foods and fresh produce. Geared towards bringing fresh food into the neighborhood after every other viable options vanished, FLCM was created as a food club that offered fresh and healthy products. The process happens as follows: First, people create a shopping list by checking off items they want to purchase, with three spaces for them to write various food options. Next, someone working with the service will buy the food and people can pick it up at the Spartan Center or get it delivered to them. In the service, food such as fish and meats (from Wholey's), bread (from Mancini's), and many healthy foods and canned goods are provided for customers at a discounted price making it worthwhile to purchase from FLCM. Eventually, the service became self-sustaining from grants and small profits from purchases, to the point where they had operating money and they were able to provide people with insulated bags for their produce. Within the operations of this service, Reverend Les and Deacon Tom both play vital roles in operating FLCM. Rev. Les is considered to be a founder/cofounder and

Deacon Tom is the financial aid secretary and treasurer. Aside from working with FLCM, Reverend Les used to take people in the neighborhood to Walmart so that they could do their mass shopping without having to spend money for transportation or attempting to carry a multitude of heavy bags home.

From the time that FLCM was created, a lot of improvements and changes have been made from an operations standpoint. The goal of offering this service was to change the food service in the community in order for residents to start getting a more nutritional food plan. Since their inception, FLCM has shown a significant amount of development over time. The overall quality of the food has improved since FLCM has moved to a site where they have access to a commercial kitchen. Additionally, FLCM coordinates with the local food bank and Saint Stephens, for a place that people can share meals together. The connections that the service has made has now expanded with more churches working together as well as more organizations in the community. The model of FLCM has also recently changed and has allowed people to start making their orders through Dylamato's market.

With the connection that FLCM has with other organizations, Meals on Wheels is one that often stands out. Since approximately 2016, the Meals on Wheels pro-

gram has been offering home-delivered pre-prepared meals to people in Hazelwood, Glen-Hazel, and Greenfield. Meals on Wheels holds lunches at Saint Stephens pastoral center so people can come over and pick it up or eat it there. Deacon Tom said that, "we feed roughly 50 people a month, maybe 200 meals or as many as 400 meals a month now, which is a lot."

Offering FLCM in these neighborhoods has created various benefits for the residents living there due to the accessibility of it all. FLCM has both quality food and quality prices, both of which helped people to get fresh food at a more reasonable price. When FLCM began to allow food stamps to be used, more people from the community started to use the service. With the neighborhood still being partially considered a "food desert" because of the lack of fresh produce available, the presence of this service in the community has helped to change that. With different organizations such as FLCM, Congregate Feeding, Meals on Wheels, and Dylamato's market, the food desert title is slowly diminishing as fresh foods come into the neighborhood. Rev. Les explained that having this service in the community also created a social network. Volunteers came from different churches and organizations and people that never knew each other are now working together. With FLCM being in the Hazelwood Towers and Roselle

court, it encourages people to come out of their apartments and interact with one another. Overall, the improvement of people's nutrition has been one of the most significant and lasting benefits for people that take advantage of the services offered.

FLCM has done a lot of positive work for the community and they hope to bring more to the neighborhood in the future. One expansion that is soon to come is offering dinner nights for families to eat together. "We want to get back to the old fashion where the families come in, eat with the kids...it's a wonderful dynamic because you know what your children are up to and the children know what their parents are up to," says Rev. Les. The idea that families will eat together is an exciting thing for people in the community as well as the organizers of it. Deacon Tom and Rev. Les also stated that they would like to see more people taking advantage of these services that are offered. Instead of continuing to get the same people taking advantage of it, they want to expand the pool of people using this service.

If you or someone you know would like to buy food using the FLCM service their information is as follows:

Fishes and Loaves Cooperative  
Ministries  
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