

Fishes and Loaves - Moving Forward

By Deacon Tom Berna

In 2011 Fishes and Loaves Cooperative Ministries started a Buying Club to bring Healthy (Wholesome) Food to residents of Hazelwood and surrounding areas at reasonable prices. Our first delivery, operating out of the Hazelwood Presbyterian Church, occurred on June 2, 2011. Since then we have filled orders twice a month for members of the Buying Club.

We started sourcing our food from Rob-ert Wholey's in the Strip District, and we continue to purchase fish, meat and produce from Wholey's – the company has generously supported our efforts from day one, and we are grateful for their partnership. We offer bread from Mancini's, located next to Wholey's – again they have been very generous in their support of the Buying Club, and we are able to offer their products at very reasonable prices. In 2014 we began purchasing much of our dairy products and some produce from Aldi's on Carson St. in the South Side – quality and prices are very attractive, and we feel obligated to serve

our members by purchasing quality food at the lowest available prices. More recently we've begun purchasing fresh produce from Dylamato's Market, located here in Hazelwood. In addition, we have been purchasing select products from Elite Treats and Specialty Feasts, another Hazelwood business, owned by Leroy and Rena Welch, and they offer "Monster Cookies" along with yeast rolls, cookies and a Cinnamon Swirl Loaf that is quite a treat.

The customer base for Fishes and Loaves started primarily in the Hazelwood Towers, and in 2013, residents in Roselle Court organized volunteers so that Fishes and Loaves could begin filling orders for their residents. Since the Buying Club has no paid employees, we rely on volunteers to fill orders on the first and third Saturday morning of each month. We fill orders at the Hazelwood Christian Church (118 Glen Caladh) where Pastor Scott Stine shepherds the congregation. Members of Hazelwood Christian Church have extended hospitality to Fishes and Loaves since the Buying Club moved from Hazelwood Presbyterian Church.

The Buying Club has received generous donations from private individuals as well as from charitable organizations and foundations: The Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, the Presbyterian Church, the Heinz Foundation and Duquesne University. Whole Foods has chosen Fishes and Loaves as one of two charities to benefit from its annual campaign to fight hunger; each Whole Foods customer who uses their own bag will be offered \$0.05 for themselves or one of the charities. Fishes and Loaves has used these grants to keep prices low for customers, and we have generated gift certificates allowing members to purchase food from the Buying Club.

How is the Buying Club moving forward?

From its inception, the Buying Club intended to accept EBT/SNAP for payment. The application process has proved to be more complicated than we had expected. Finally, on October 2, 2014 we received no-

tification from the USDA that we have been approved to accept EBT/SNAP. Our plan is to use of EBT/SNAP with existing customers during the month of October and to offer this option to all customers beginning in November, just in time for Thanksgiving. We already accept debit cards (MasterCard and Visa) along with cash and checks.

Want to learn more about the Fishes and Loaves Buying Club? Ask a member or one of the following persons who serve on the Steering Committee: Fr. Vince Stegman, Deacon Tom Berna, Rev. Les Boone, Jim Richter, Pastor Scott Stine. Dianne Shenk also has detailed knowledge of the Buying Club – we can all provide you with a membership application and order form. They are also available online at: <http://www.ststephen-hazelwood.org/flcm-buying-club>. Membership is open to everyone who supports the mission of the Buying Club: "Bringing Healthy Food to Residents of Hazelwood and the surrounding areas."

For more info, contact Deacon Tom at dcn.tom@ststephen-hazelwood.org