

Volunteers of the Month - Grace Friday Night 2.0

Grace Lutheran Church began feeding neighbors in need more than nine years ago, and up until March, the protocol was always the same. A rotating group of volunteers would arrive at about noon and begin going through the fresh food that had been secured the day before from Foodshare and arrive at the menu. They then prepared enough for at least 150 or more people so that after everyone had their fill, there would be leftovers for those who needed it to take home. Other churches from surrounding communities would often volunteer to prepare something ahead and bring it along when they came to help serve. It's been one of the most social free dinners in Hartford because people would gather beginning at 4:30 and just share company until 6:00 when the food was served.

So when the Governor's order was announced, they had to make some quick changes. They determined that they could still figure out how to prepare the hot meals, and disposable containers and utensils had to substitute for the church's stoneware china and stainless forks and spoons.

The part that was non-negotiable was the compassionate caring for this very regular community. Protective masks, both for the staff and the clients became a most important addition. Styrofoam food containers are still readily available, so until they can gather and share the food in common



it will continue as the container of choice, but disposable masks are still in short supply. Louisa Barton Duguay, Akeva Koulla and volunteers from St. Matthews in Avon, who have been a steady partner since the social distancing order began, have been sewing cloth masks that can last much longer.

What still cannot be replaced is of course the camaraderie, but as Joni Mitchell once said, "you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone". I think we'll remember for quite a while once we get it back.

More photos of the Grace Friday night are at

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/FtZcmMqhYLiAbH3w7>