

May 26, 2020

Dear Friends of St. Andrew Lutheran,

On behalf of the staff of Inspiritus Nashville, I want to send you a short update on all the happenings since the beginning of 2020, especially as we navigate the COVID-19 crisis that has gripped our world.

In January and February, we were settling into our new office space in the former St. Paul's Lutheran Church and navigating the management of two new programs. When the tornados hit on March 3rd and the COVID crisis on its heels, our work had just begun. The weeks that followed narrowed our focus on hunger relief. Due to the shelter in place orders for all nonessential workers, it was ever more important for our employees to step up. **Many pantries closed throughout Nashville, but not ours.** Each day Christie Farrar worked tirelessly in the food bank, delivering meals, delivering personal care items, and checking on neighbors in need. Thankfully, with the help of a grant from the SE Synod of the ELCA, we were able to hire one of our neighbors, Gloria Oliver, to assist. We saw many new families come to us for emergency food supplies, and the requests continue to build to this day. The 1,555 individuals served at the food bank in the last three months and hundreds of additional families served with onsite meals and personal care bags would have lost hope without our consistent food bank staff, their willingness to deliver to those in need, and our expanded hours of operation. **Your support made that possible!**

At the same time, spring was planting season. Without volunteer Plant & Soil Days, I spent the last two months making sure all our gardeners had soil, plants, and seeds and signed up new gardeners in each neighborhood. I missed our volunteers! But what a blessing to be with these wonderful families whose smiles and warmth pierced the dread of what was going on in the world and radiated right down into their little gardens. The joy we all felt when the seeds began to sprout and bloom is nothing short of heaven on earth. Although late frost and drenching rains threatened our early planting (and we received more requests for new gardens than we had hours in the day to fill), most of the 180+ gardens are **GROWING beautifully!**

A milestone event happened in May with the purchase of a 2014 Nissan Frontier truck for our programs. Already, we have used the vehicle to plant gardens in Hickman County, pick up food drive donations in Williamson

County, deliver MyCanvas Youth Arts take-home kits in Rutherford County, and deliver meals throughout Nashville. This truck has been a goal for our staff for such a long time; to see it to fruition makes us all so thankful and grateful.

Beginning in June, Inspiritus Nashville will **expand our feeding programs** to include youth lunches for several public housing neighborhoods in Davidson County on Tuesdays and Fridays. We will continue to distribute 500 meals each week from a local restaurant for those affected by COVID-19. And thanks to a generous donation of 745 fuel bags from St. Andrew Lutheran, we will be distributing lunch bags for those in need.

MyCanvas moved the spring workshops to an online Google classroom format. Youth who have participated in MyCanvas workshops in the past were given a bag **FULL of art supplies**, thanks to the support of many Thrivent Action Teams. We were able to make 95 bags and we hope to make many more to distribute to artists in each community. Our plans are to continue this online format until it is safe to resume workshops or be able to meet with youth in much smaller family groups.

Building Healthy Families group meetings are “on hold” throughout the summer. But each week we invite participants to pick up much-needed household and personal care items, and we continue to make sure all families are supplied with food and essentials. We **MISS** each other and we look forward to a time we can safely resume this activity.

Thank you for helping us continue the mission and ministry of walking with individuals and families on a path from surviving to thriving and restoring them to a place where they enrich the world around them. I pray you and your families are safe and well. Thank you for your continued support of the work of Inspiritus Nashville, and know we will continue to serve our neighbors and seek new ways to reach those affected by this crisis.

Blessings,

Janet D. Arning