



Food Pantry Dedication and Blessing

On April 22, St. Thomas of Canterbury welcomed Bishop Francis Kane, the Order of Malta, and Catholic Charities of Chicago CEO Sally Blount to celebrate the blessing of the new indoor operations of the Food Pantry.

The Food Pantry, which is open twice a day on Mondays and Thursdays, is operated by Catholic Charities, and has seen a significant increase in the number of clients it serves.

In January 2022, it served 509 households for a total of 793 individuals. In April 2022, the Food Pantry at St. Thomas served 858 households covering 1,299 individuals.

In 2022, the Food Pantry moved indoors and began operating under a choice model, allowing clients a more comfortable experience – and a more dignified one, where they can make choices about the food they receive, much as they would in a grocery store.

(continued on page 2)



*Bishop Francis Kane and Deacon Paul Spalla at the Food Pantry blessing
April 22*

St. Thomas of Canterbury Outreach

Ministries Newsletter

Spring 2022

Before



Shelves and refrigeration allow clients to better see what is available and select what they want, a major renovation made possible through the generosity of Order of Malta, parishioners of Mary, Mother of God Parish and Saints Joseph and Francis Xavier Parish Catholic Church in Wilmette.

But the room itself still lacked something. Located in the basement at St. Thomas, the ceiling is lined with pipes and fluorescent lighting, with little to no natural light or decoration to brighten the space.

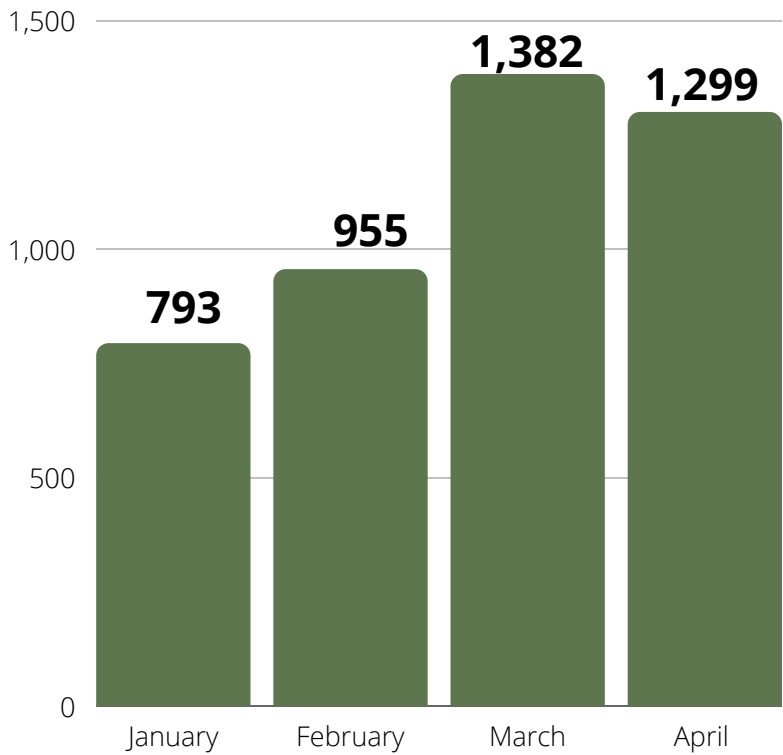
After



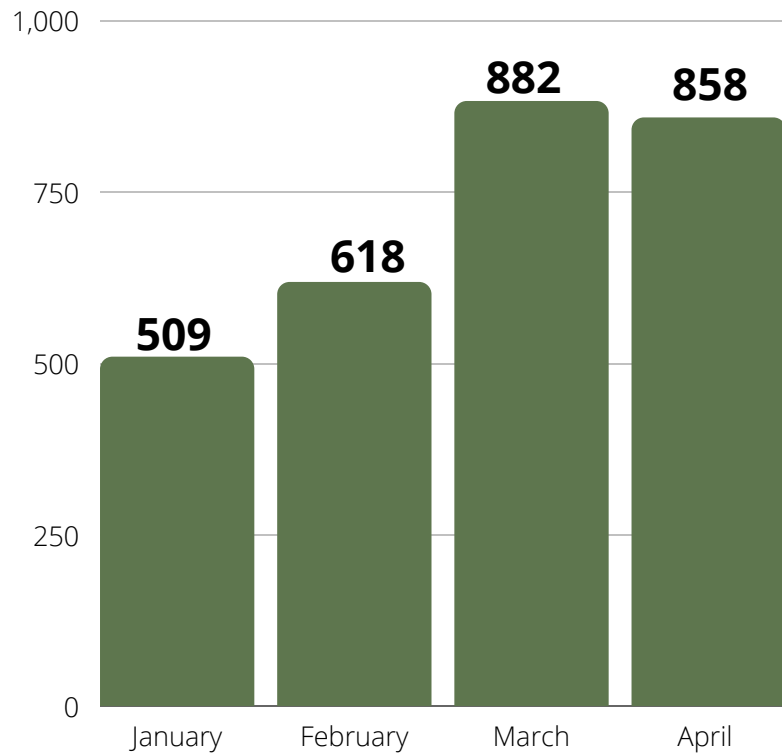
That's where Michael Magada, a parishioner at Mary, Mother of God, stepped in. He has created three murals for the walls of the pantry that surround clients and volunteers with color and beauty. The focal point, a depiction of Jesus multiplying the loaves and fishes, is a stunning reminder of the reason for the outreach at St. Thomas of Canterbury church: the love of Christ.



Individuals Served by Food Pantry in 2022



Households Served by Food Pantry in 2022



"Do you have rice?"

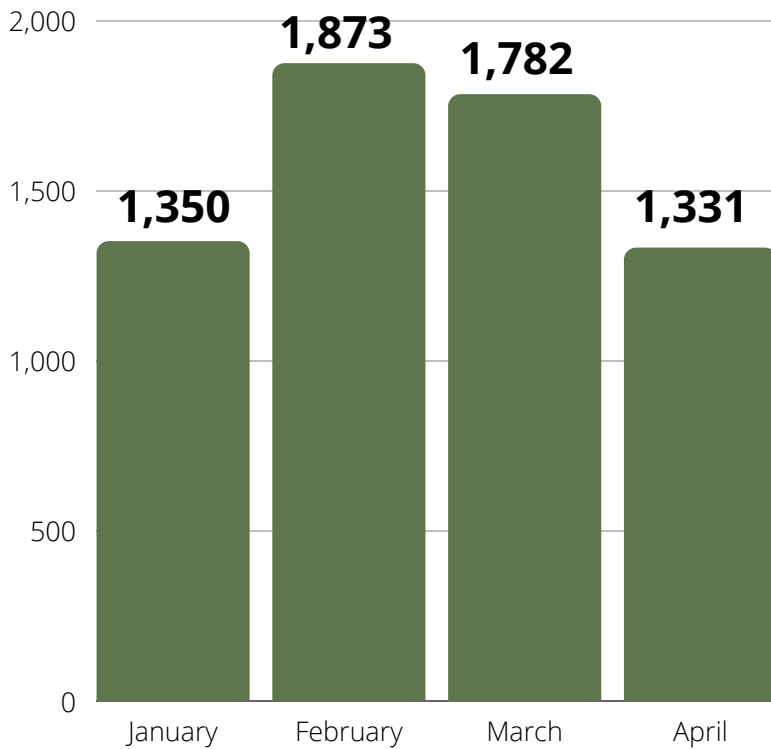
"Do you have oil?"

These were two of the most common questions from guests during a recent visit to the food pantry. St. Thomas serves many clients who are elderly and of Asian background. They particularly need rice and cooking oil - and these items run out very quickly, according to Sr. Laurenti, of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Christ.

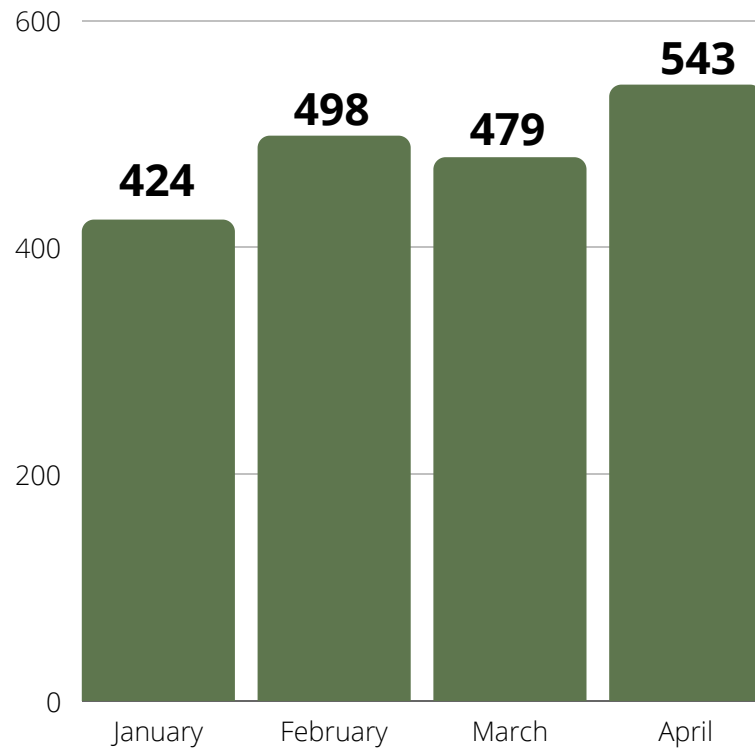
Donations can be dropped off at St. Thomas of Canterbury Church (4827 N. Kenmore) on Tuesdays and Fridays from 2-3:30 PM.

Soup Kitchen Servings

Meals Served



Guests Served



Calling Volunteers!

Are you free on Tuesday or Friday afternoons? During the summer months, with students on their break, we need help in the soup kitchen. Contact Jennifer at jfranco@archchicago.org to learn more. Come once during the summer just to see the work we do -- or come every week if you want to!

Partner Spotlight:

The Sisters of Christian Charity in Wilmette, IL

The Soup Kitchen at St. Thomas of Canterbury has been receiving generous donations from the Sisters of Christian Charity in Wilmette, Illinois, since winter 2021.

The partnership came as a pleasant surprise, according to Jennifer Franco, coordinator of outreach volunteers at Mary, Mother of God parish. The Sisters were the ones who reached out to St. Thomas with the offer of help. Sacred Heart Convent, where the Sisters of Christian Charity live in Wilmette, had been receiving more food than it needed from grocery stores such as Trader Joe's.

The Sisters wanted to ensure that the extra food would go to those that needed it the most, so a representative came to the Soup Kitchen to see operations – and to volunteer there.

“He just wanted to see what [the Soup Kitchen] was, and he was really happy with what he saw,” Jennifer said.

The donations from the Sisters consist primarily of produce, bread and ready-to-eat sandwiches and salads. The Sisters also drive the donations down to Chicago from Wilmette, which saves a long trip for the volunteers getting the Soup Kitchen ready.

Once the donations arrive, they need to be sorted. Produce would go to the kitchen, for example. Ready-to-eat items would go out for soup kitchen guests to take as needed.

“We've had a table with stuff that we can't use for the dinner but that people can take home, and it's been emptied out,” Jennifer said.



Why Beauty?

“I felt that charity was a word to choke over. Who wanted charity?”

-Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*



The outreach at St. Thomas of Canterbury - and at Mary, Mother of God parish as a whole – is centered on Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Matthew: “For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison, and you visited me.”

It might seem strange, then, to spend time and resources on installing murals in the food pantry at St. Thomas. Why expend those scarce commodities on art when people are going hungry?

The answer is hidden in the last lines that Jesus uses to describe himself in the poor: a stranger who was welcomed, a sick person cared for, a prisoner visited. These needs are physical, certainly, but they also touch on the deeper needs of the human person, the needs that cannot be assuaged by material things alone.

Human beings are body and soul. The needs of the body must be met, but the human soul has its own hungers, and it can starve if they are not filled. As human beings we yearn for truth, goodness, unity and beauty. As human beings, we have an inherent dignity in that we are made in God’s image and likeness. A recurring image in the Creation story in Genesis is God looking at his creation and finding it good. We are meant to contemplate what is good, true and beautiful, and delight in it.

The murals at St. Thomas add brightness and color to a basement space. But there is much more to their presence than an improved aesthetic. The murals challenge us to remember that this is not an assembly line of distribution, the cold charity that Dorothy Day decried so fiercely in her autobiography. The work is a participation in Christ’s love and radiance in the world, and the images are a potent reminder.

When you walk into the food pantry, the movement through the room flows toward Jesus multiplying the loaves and fishes. Next comes the image of people gathering together in the fellowship of community. And as you walk the length of the space, you travel through a depiction of the wilderness of the Midwest, before Chicago was built.

None of us want “charity” as a cold and impersonal handout, or as a patronizing act of largesse from on high. We want love that answers our full human needs, recognizing that we all need food – and beauty – to live as the full human beings we were created to be.