



Cedar Rapids, Iowa

FSPA outreach: to give is to receive

“I am humbled and grateful for her assistance in our mission ... supplying hope and solidarity to all ages, races and faiths,” says Barb Kane, program director for Metro Catholic Outreach, an organization in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that gives food and rent and utility assistance to those in need. She is speaking of Laurie Sullivan, FSPA, who manages the food pantry there.

“I feel the desire to give to others instead of just receiving,” says a MCO client, who has partaken gratefully in the food program facilitated by Sister Laurie.

“The clients have taught me about gratefulness and reliance on God,” says Sister Laurie of her MCO ministry. She sponsors a FSPA grant that helps strengthen this trinity of social justice, human need and grace and trust. Each perspective provides proof that to give is to receive; that to give is to receive; that to give—is—to receive.

MCO Program Director Barb Kane:

Of the organization—a consolidation of 11 Catholic parishes in the Cedar Rapids metro area—Barb says, “We supply immediate, tangible goods to help our clients solve current crises of hunger, utility disconnection and eviction, but while walking with them in search of resources we also offer a human touch that is more valuable.

“Since opening in February 2012, MCO has served more than 9,027 people from its food pantry and our financial assistance program has helped 750 families. We see a cross section of the population from retired couples to single adults and both two-parent and single-parent families, all ranging in age from birth to over 75 years old. They are working and unemployed. Some speak very little English as immigrants from Hispanic countries and many parts of Africa. The people we serve are the children of God; anyone in need of food is given as we are able without restriction.

“I could never say enough to accurately describe Sister Laurie’s impact on MCO. She has a heart of mission and serves humbly, truly the hands and feet of Christ. We are so fortunate



In the pantry at Metro Catholic Outreach Sister Laurie Sullivan (pictured right), with volunteer Annette Williams, prepares baskets of food for the program’s clients.

to have her as an ambassador of the Catholic community.”

Client:

“I receive a monthly food box, but just coming to MCO to pick it up is enriching. I am empowered to do better and not give up. When times are dark, it gives me a light of hope.”

Sister Laurie Sullivan:

“MCO is a relatively young organization so my ministry continues to evolve as does the agency itself. I manage the pantry, corresponding weekly with the 11 sponsoring parishes and the general public, utilizing Facebook and the MCO website (www.metrocatholicoutreach.org) to secure food availability for our neighbors in need. I coordinate about 100 volunteers who prepare and distribute over 400 boxes of food each month. Also, in the hopes of assisting them to a better and healthier lifestyle, I organize classes for our clients in budgeting and food preparation. As we provide food and financial assistance we continue to connect on a

deeper level with those whom we have the privilege to serve, becoming more aware of and responding to other needs.

“My supervisor and I are the only staff members yet with volunteers, we have a smooth-running operation and have formed a community that genuinely cares and looks out for one another. I personally have been supported and encouraged in my religious life journey and in turn support them. Together we complement each other’s gifts and talents.

“Our clients challenge me in my life of privilege and call me to live my vow of poverty in a deeper way. I have to say I’ve had many outstanding experiences. Once I was chatting with a woman in line as she waited to receive her box of food. She asked if she could volunteer and as we set a date and time said ‘Thank you! Now I have a reason to get up in the morning.’ She later opened up and shared that, although she had a life-threatening illness, the opportunity to volunteer had given her a purpose to live.

“For me, it was so simple to listen. One never knows how simply listening and offering a hand for another to grasp can make a difference; even in giving another,” says Sister Laurie, “the will to live.” ■