

When Michelle and I started Table of Grace, one thing I knew I was called to do was feed people. It was a very strong call as a church, we began collecting food items like anybody else would who would start a food pantry. One day a friend and I looked at the food we had collected and I remember thinking, there isn't much here to make a full meal. I also remember thinking I wouldn't feed much of this food to my friends. There was a large lot of Ramen noodles, Vienna sausages, flaming hot Cheetos, expired items, cans of bamboo shoots, etc. I was able to identify one possible meal which consisted of a jar of spaghetti sauce w/meat and pasta.

I remember thinking no, this isn't what this food pantry is supposed to be like. We can do better than this. With a little further discerning, the idea of a meal menu came to mind. A menu where guests could come and choose what meals they wanted and could make at home. Things just started flowing. Thoughts like this concept would take the guesswork out for donors too. There would be no more standing in the middle of the store wondering what items would be most helpful. It would eliminate random items being donated that many times aren't very helpful.

As time passed, things became more clear to me as to how life of The Pantry was supposed to be. I envisioned it being very community oriented. I envisioned several members in the community, individuals, local businesses and churches coming together to support this pantry. The Pantry wasn't to be just a church Pantry, supported by its members, it was supposed to be community supported, and it is.

This was inspired by Jesus feeding the 5000. Over the years I now see that story differently than I once did. The miracle to me is Jesus was able to get people to give what they had and for others to take what they needed and in the end, there was plenty left. It may sound simple but if you really think about it, it's pretty amazing he was able to get a large crowd of people to give what they had and others to take what they needed and then in the end, there was plenty left. Again, it may sound simple but if you really think about it, it's a pretty amazing miracle.

It's very community oriented and diverse volunteer wise too. One of the greatest stories that Michelle likes to share is one day when she walked into The Pantry, there was a transgender girl in transition, serving at the welcome table with two Mormon missionary boys.

To me, that is a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven. When we come together as communities, without boundaries and borders, and just serve our neighbors.

It's beautiful.

We have many people involved in The Pantry. The LDS church are strong supporters, along with the secular homeschool group, the Christian homeschool group, many who identify as atheist, a variety of school groups, and many more. It's been really great to see the diversity and how a large number of individuals and small local businesses can really make big things happen every month. The owner of the local Chick-fil-A here donates flour each month and puts on a couple fundraisers every year to support The Pantry. It's just awesome to see the barriers removed and seeing people come together to serve their neighbors.

Each month The Pantry needs around \$1200 to operate. That money doesn't come from grants or big companies. That money comes from many individuals, near and far, who donate \$10, \$20 \$50 or more, local businesses and a few churches. There is a very strong community feel to The Pantry.

I also envisioned that every guest would be just that, a guest. Not a number, not a client or recipient, but a guest. It was important to deliver the same hospitality to our guest as they would receive in a nice restaurant. Because when you're at a point that you're struggling to provide food for your family, the last thing you want to do is go to a food pantry and feel like a number. It's very important for us to treat everybody with dignity, respect and hospitality.

This was inspired by my experience in taking other people to different food pantries. The people had already felt embarrassed and defeated. I would watch workers talk to many people like they were

numbers or subjects. Nothing about those experiences felt like God's love, which to me, feels like Jesus happily saying come, I have what you need, I can help you.

The other very important element and vision of The Pantry was/is there would be no documentation or requirements that somebody had to meet in order to get food. Anyone who needed food and we mean anyone, can just come get the food they need to make filling, nutritious and delicious meals for themselves their families.

This was inspired by Jesus in a saying in Sarah Miles' book, *Take this Bread*. From that book, I was reminded that Jesus said feed my sheep/feed my people. He didn't say feed my people after you check the ID, and make sure they fit the requirements or after you interview them to make sure they are worthy of receiving food. That really hit me hard. There are so many obstacles out there that stop people from getting basic items that they need and I didn't want this to be one of those things. We've had people ask, aren't you afraid that people are going to take advantage of The Pantry? Our answer usually is if they do, they do. It's just food and that's none of our business.

We are called to feed people.

The other thing that we try very hard not to do is proselytize. We don't want people feeling like there's something they have to do in order to get food or there is some hidden agenda that we have. Our only goal is to help make people's lives easier and empower them with great meal options.

When I came up with the menu idea and things started falling into place, Kolbi, who is now the Director of The Pantry, came along and said hey, I can help with this. Right from the start, she was amazing and dedicated to this new way of feeding people through a pantry. She has put her heart and soul into all the visions I ever had. She helped bring those visions to life and has maintained them superbly to this day.

The Pantry is like a well-oiled machine and hasn't really changed a whole lot in the past four years it's been serving the community. Each month we serve around 400 people on average. We anticipate this number going up when people start hearing more about our services.

Because we are set up to only take specific items for the meals we offer, we have had to turn down help from the bigger food banks who offer pallets of different food items that have been donated to them. We've also had to turn down potential grants because we won't ask people for certain documentation. But that has never proven to be a problem. Food donations and the money needed to operate this food pantry successfully have always been there.