

## Food pantry continues to serve the community

Written by Kyle Arnoldy  
Wednesday, 01 May 2013 13:07 -

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For more than two decades, the food pantry at Holyoke's First United Methodist Church has been lending a helping hand to those who are in need.

When citizens have turned to the Methodist Church for food supplies, they have been greeted by the caring, helpful volunteers who donate their time to help stock, organize and distribute the goods. For the past 15 years, Paula Strode has been the face of the program, graciously fulfilling the public service, but her time at the food pantry is coming to an end.

Strode has decided it is time to pass the role to fellow volunteer Donna Lutze.

Lutze has been assisting Strode for the past three years and officially took over the position in February.



**Pictured from left at the local food pantry at First United Methodist Church of Holyoke are Pastor Al Strauss, new pantry coordinator Donna Lutze and retiring coordinator Paula Strode.□□**

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### —Enterprise photo

With the help and donations of local individuals and businesses, the pantry is able to provide food to those who have no other means of feeding themselves.

Organizations such as the Challengers 4-H Club and AWANA, along with a number of other businesses including Viaero Wireless and the Holyoke Post Office have hosted food drives in the past to help the cause.

Just recently, Grainland Co-op donated nearly \$500 along with a generous amount of food to the program.

“It has taken a lot of years, but we have gotten some great support,” Strode said.

Strode noted that the pantry is busiest between pay days. In the past, people who moved to Holyoke in search of a job have also utilized the service when work is hard to find.

“It has been really gratifying,” Strode said of her time at the food pantry. “I met great people and made great friends. It really expanded my world as I got to know different cultures.”

Both Strode and Lutze said they were drawn to the position because they saw a chance to help.

“I just saw the need and decided to step forward,” Lutze said. “I am nervous. I’m hoping that word gets out that we’re here and can help people.”

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For those who wish to donate, the pantry is always in need of canned meats, canned fruits, spaghetti sauce, rice, peanut butter and any other food that is rich in protein. Paper products and toiletries are also welcome.

### **New program initiated to further help the hungry**

With the new position, Lutze will also be helping Pastor Al Strauss get a new program off the ground. Along with the food provided in the food pantry, the 4x4 program will provide four people with food for four days. Coupons will also be included in the program that will allow those in need to buy milk, produce and other products to create a healthier meal.

“We’re glad to help people with this and that, but we really want people to have a full, complete, nutritious meal,” Strauss said.

While the food pantry is a lifeline for many who are living week to week and paycheck to paycheck, the 4x4 program is more of a complete meal, ideal for families with children.

Strauss mentioned that over the years the church has built a beautiful relationship with the community, and they want to continue to be a church known for offering help.

Although it is just a dream of his for now, Strauss would love to see the church expand the services they offer. He mentioned a soup kitchen would be beneficial as well as transitional housing and establishing a narcotics anonymous group.

The food pantry is open every Thursday from 3-4:30 p.m. at First United Methodist Church, located at 230 E. Furry Street in Holyoke. Arrangements can also be made by contacting the

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church at 854-2433. Office hours are from 8 a.m.-1 p.m., Monday-Thursday.

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