

## February 2021

It's already been one year since COVID started, and we are still looking for a light at the end of the tunnel. The vaccine is becoming available but it is not enough for everyone yet. We hope to see changes and get back to normal. When that will happen, we don't know; but, it's the most asked question around us.

The only thing I know is that we need to continue doing what God has called us to do: to be good neighbors, to help those in need, to spread the gospel by showing love to those who are forgotten and rejected, to be the light in the darkness, and to give hope when there is no hope. I know that before us is a year full of changes, and that many people are looking to see those changes as soon as possible. Many immigrant families have their hopes up to see their family members again after such a long time, but they also look forward to an easier path to citizenship and legal authorization for work.

Right now, we have our hands full with applications for utility assistance. I'm thankful for local organizations willing to help the ones in need! We help by filling out applications for them. Soon we expect more pleas for help with citizenship and permanent resident forms.

There are also questions from parents about our tutoring program. Kids are struggling with online learning and are falling behind since parents are not able to help them out. We have started looking for volunteers, so we can start tutoring in March at least with the kids that we know have special learning needs. By limiting the numbers, we can maintain safe distancing rules.

There are so many things that we can do in our city! We did some things last year and look to do much more this year. But again, with your support, with your help. We are posting some of the things that were done last year with your generous gifts.

Third Baptist Church called us to let us know that they had funds for special projects; and, they asked if we had any needs. We applied for the special project grant, for what

we needed which was a better printer and laptops in the International Fellowship building. Between a couple of applicants, they chose us. We had a printer in the International Fellowship building, but for some reason it was awfully slow. We are quite happy with the new one because it's very fast and efficient. The four laptops mean a lot for our tutoring program. They are also used a lot for people who need a computer to complete an online form or when they are seeking our help in filling out an application. Thank you, Third Baptist Church!



Christmas should be time of Joy, but 2020 left many in tears and sorrow as losing a family member or friend leaves an empty space in people's hearts. The times were hard on the kids who could not go back to school for such a long time and see their friends; however, we wanted to provide them a Christmas gift as in year's past to bring a smile to their faces and to show them that we still think about them even if we have not seen them this year at the tutoring program. Thanks to Southwest Baptist Church, Dayspring BC, Kirkwood BC, and Third Baptist Church for making the effort to buy gifts for these children. THANK YOU!



### Women's Shelter

We want to recognize the donations that we got in support of the Center for Women in Transition including a significant donation from Fee Fee Baptist Church, donations from Third Baptist Church and many others who heard about our collection. You heard our request for help, and we are so thankful for your donations.

### Oak Hill School

It is such a blessing to have a team always willing to help and support ideas on how to better serve our neighbors and help those in need. We heard that an elementary school in our neighborhood had a large proportion of international students and that all of their students qualified for free or reduced lunches. With remote learning, food insecurity became a bigger concern as there was an additional free, balanced meal being missed by the kids. Our team came together, and we decided to make a bag with nutritious food for each student. We received a very gracious email from the Principal of Oak Hill Elementary School saying that they appreciated our help and that the parents are grateful for the assistance. The additional help with groceries allows them to put more money toward their utility bills. We want to thank you all for your donations and thanks to all the volunteers for coming together and making this possible.

## Story from Food Pantry

During 16 years of providing a community food pantry, we have met a variety of people in need. Some of them come to the pantry for a couple of years. Others have come here as refugees, cannot work because of age or illness, receive disability income, but do not have enough money for utilities; they have been coming to our pantry for a long time already.

Then we know cases in which someone loses a job and comes to us with an apology that they have no other choice than to ask for food. As soon as they get hired, many will come with bags full of food with a note that when they were in need they got help and now they want to return the favor by helping others.

So many people come with burdens and are just looking for a nice word. They come with prayer requests.

But since last year, the way we serve in the food pantry has changed drastically because of COVID. We knew that we could not stop distributing food, but we are close to one year without having people come into the building. Now everything is drive through, but it hasn't stopped us from talking with people and asking them about other ways we can help them in addition to food. Usually many of them will ask for help with utility bills.

Last October I was greeting people while volunteers were packing food into cars. One of the women we have known for a long time opened the window on her car, not only to say hi, but also to ask how we are doing and to wish us blessings for what we do. This time she had money in her hands, and she told me: "I know it's not much, but I want to help." I told her to keep the money, that she needs it more than we do, that we are glad we can help, that we don't need anything in return. But she was persistent and pushed the money into my hand saying, "Please take it. This is the only way I can show how I appreciate what you do. And next Saturday I will bring you a letter to all volunteers to express my thankfulness to all of you." The next Saturday I was looking for her. After we finished with the food pantry that day, I asked Sasha if I had missed her or if she didn't come that day. Then Sasha replied that someone came over to inform us that she had passed away and to invite us to her funeral. I was in shock. We are surely going to miss seeing her and her smile.

It's not only boxes of food, but we build relationships with every person that comes. Many of them are looking not only for food, but also for smiles, understanding, and friendship. There is one scripture from the Bible that says: **"let us not grow weary of doing good."**

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