



METROPOLIS OF BOSTON

Chapter 3027, St. Nicholas
Lexington, MA

PROJECT: Expansion of Our Current Feeding the Hungry Programs

When we were asked to participate in the Chapter Challenge 2014-2016, rather than initiate a new project, we chose to expand on our existing efforts to help feed those in need.

Lift Up Lexington Project This was a program involving many local faith communities. It was set up to feed local families being housed at a nearby hotel. The purpose was to provide these families with a home-cooked meal once a month to supplement the meals they were able to cook in the kitchens available to them. The churches and synagogues involved took turns hosting these meals on a rotating basis each month. We participated in this project twice, giving to those in need a warm setting while also providing games and donating books to the younger family members.

LexEat Together Lift Up Lexington was eventually replaced by LexEat Together, and so we redirected our efforts to this program. LexEat Together is set up to feed local people in need once a week on Wednesdays at a local church in Lexington. The goal of this new program is to provide a consistent day and location for the weekly meal, so as to help guests know when and where the weekly meal will be served. This program is in need of funds to purchase food, as well as volunteers to prepare and serve food. To date, we have contributed \$400 to LexEat Together. We are also awaiting open volunteer spots, so as to provide direct service as well. We plan to continue helping this worthy cause.

Project Bread Support During this two year period, we have also continued to contribute at least \$100 annually to Project Bread, a state-wide anti-hunger organization that invests millions of dollars in community-based food programs, food pantries, elder meal programs and more, in order to reach Massachusetts' most vulnerable populations.

Lexington Interfaith Garden This project has been in existence going on seven years. The purpose of the garden is to provide quality, fresh produce to the local food pantries. Several of our members have been working on this project and we recently signed up more volunteers who will participate as well. The program runs from March to November each year. The volunteers work in a donated plot in Lexington where they prepare the soil, plant seeds, weed, water, harvest and deliver the fresh food to Lexington Food Pantry for distribution on the same day items are picked. Forty-five varieties of produce and herbs are grown here.

On one Saturday last year 220 pounds of food were delivered in one day. On eight Saturdays, the harvest was more than 100 lbs. During the 2015 season, 1,666 pounds of fresh produce were grown and delivered.

The Lexington Interfaith Food Pantry We also have stepped up our efforts to collect non-perishable food items that we deliver to the Interfaith Food Pantry located in the Episcopal parish across the street

from St Nicholas. We have been contributing to this pantry in various ways for many years and, as part of this challenge, we not only continue to collect appropriate food items and donate cash for them to use where needed, we have also started a program to facilitate donations by our parish members.

As part of this food pantry donation program, members of St. Irene's Philoptochos shop at a local supermarket for needed food items, which we sort into bags with \$10 worth of food. During our Sunday fellowship hours after our church services, parishioners are given the option to donate \$10 for one of these bags of food. Philoptochos members then bring these bags to the food pantry. This effort has proven to be very successful and has increased the amount and the quality of food we are able to donate to the food pantry. Even when we run out of bags to sell, many of our parishioners approach us and donate additional monies, which we, in turn, donate to the local food pantries.

In addition to the efforts listed above, our GOYA members collected food for the food pantry during one of their sleep-over events. Many of these young adults will hopefully be our future members!

The Lexington Food Pantry was kind enough to share with us a letter they received from a mother whose family of four is kept going by the efforts of this program. In her letter she said:

"It is hard to express how much your kindness has helped our family live a better life. I will try my best to put it into words, however, I fear that I cannot convey how truly blessed we feel to have the support of our community in a difficult financial time. It may seem like such a little thing to donate some canned goods, a bar of soap or bread to a local food pantry, but for the families in need, it is so much more. It is not just the food or the basic needs that give my family so much courage to keep going, but it also takes away the stress and anxiety from not having the items we need to live healthy and productive lives... I only can imagine how much work and funds go into making this food pantry run between the amazing donations, volunteers and coordinating. What I do know is that so many people, including our family are truly blessed to have the assistance at this juncture in our lives. Thank you for all that you do!"

Reading these words from someone who benefits from the efforts of organizations such as our Philoptochos not only brings tears to one's eyes, but gives us the reason to continue challenging ourselves in our efforts to help the poor – to be a true Philoptochos.

Going forward, we plan to continue helping out as much as we can in feeding the hungry, along with the many other charitable efforts we support each year.