

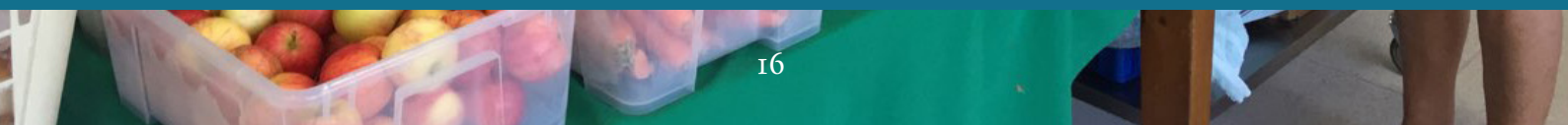
WOODLANDS FOOD PANTRY

NO JUDGMENT, NO CATCHES, JUST THE FOOD YOU NEED

by Peter Lonsdale, Perth, WA



Food Pantry is a program run by the Woodlands Congregation, Perth, and supported by Saints Care Ltd., the benevolent arm of Community of Christ, supporting the church's purpose and values through the funding of compassionate ministries and justice action.





Every congregation has probably asked these questions: if we closed our building tomorrow, would we be missed by anyone? Does what we do in this facility make a positive contribution to the wider community? In the event of closure, I'm sure members and friends attending regular Sunday worships and other congregational activities would feel a sense of loss because we are a community ourselves. But the question of our impact in the wider local community still remains.

While the congregation in Perth is aging and shrinking like many across our denomination and other mainstream churches, the need for our Food Pantry continues and it has an impact in the wider community. Following the lockdown of March 2020 in response to COVID 19, the Pantry closed for seven months. It was missed! During that time we had many enquiries from regular patrons and the local high school asking when it was opening again. Since October last year we reopened under new hygiene and social distancing requirements and from February our service has gradually returned to a pre-COVID normal - almost!

The Food Pantry meets every Wednesday morning at Woodlands, and weekly attendances average around 45 people. A part-time coordinator position funded through Saints Care and a team of around six volunteers provide food hampers and morning tea. Many people come not just for the food, but fellowship. Over a morning tea together connections are renewed

and strengthened. There is a real sense of community. At various times Evangelists Geoff Dutton and Ken Robinson, and Co Pastor Peter Lonsdale have offered the ministry of presence. The opportunities to hear life stories and share ministry often come in unexpected ways. Here are two examples.

Mary (not her real name) shared news of major surgery for cancer. She has had a hard life and lost adult children to disease and tragedy. Mary accepted an invitation for Administration as she prepared for the operation. Her carers and a few other close friends met in the chapel for a moment of prayer. She was so thankful for the support of this community and the blessing she received.

Brian (not his real name) walked in off the street one day in response to a prompting he felt. He was agitated, unsettled and confessed to suffering mental health challenges and being released from goal in the recent past. Staff rallied to provide some warm coffee, food and clothing while he shared his struggles in private counsel. By the time he left he was blessed with a spirit of peace and thanked us for the hospitality extended.

For those involved in supporting Food Pantry, it is an important social ministry providing so much more than just food. It is a place of welcome, fellowship and sanctuary. For our congregation it represents one commitment towards the Mission initiative 'Abolish Poverty and End Suffering'. May it continue to bring blessing as a positive witness in the wider community.