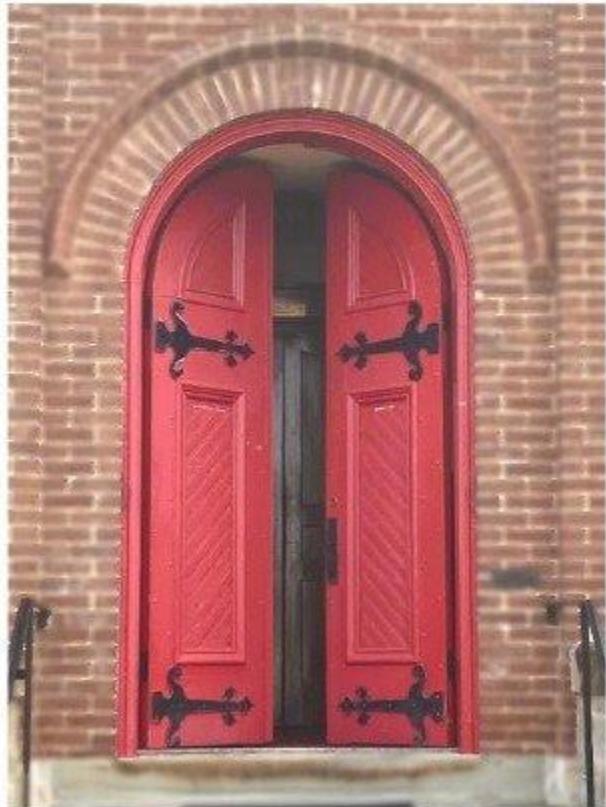


† ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Beyond* The *Red* Door



## YOU SPOKE, WE HEARD YOU

By E. Ray Walker

The times they are a-changin' at the Culpeper Food Closet's annual holiday food-giveaway project.

Food Closet director Faith Dickerson explains: "Last year, we heard from many families how hard the Christmas school break is. Families who normally can count on breakfast and lunch from school do not have that option during the 18-day break. This year, all families will face higher bills for utilities, Christmas gifts and food. In speaking with the leadership at Sam's Place, whose staffers interact with each family that visits Culpeper Food Closet, they fully supported an option to help with food during that break time."

The people spoke, and we heard them.

"Food insecurity does not take a break from creating stress for families just because it is a holiday. ... The creation of Buy a Christmas Box is in direct response to feedback from our client families."

In this, its 28th consecutive year, the Food Closet will be expanding its holiday project by giving prepacked Christmas Boxes containing shelf-stable foods to help families stretch their meal preparation. The boxes will include tuna, canned chicken, shelf-stable milk and peanut butter. In addition, there will be a dozen eggs and 2 pounds of frozen protein such as ground turkey.

"There is a focus on getting families extra protein," Dickerson said.



The box will also have oatmeal, rice, dried beans and some personal care products.

The Culpeper Safeway will also be sending \$25 gift cards from the grocery's Round Up program. This year, Safeway mandates that the gift cards go directly to clients and that the recipients must use them by December 31.

For the 17th consecutive year, SWIFT (Culpeper-based Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) is a crucial partner in this project. "SWIFT is one of our largest corporate partners, providing financial and human support (packing boxes). This is a major service project for them," Dickerson said.

The SWIFT team will be at the Food Closet on November 21 to pack the boxes. Christmas Boxes will be distributed to clients during their visits from December 1 to December 19, when school break begins. There will be one support pack per family for the season.

All recipients of the boxes are cleared as "in need" by the staff at Sam's Place, a one-stop hub in Culpeper where individuals and families can access information and referrals to other community partners.



For families wanting a Thanksgiving turkey dinner, don't worry. Two Culpeper nonprofits, Manna Ministries at Culpeper Presbyterian Church and Shiloh Baptist Church in Brandy Station, will serve fully cooked take-home Thanksgiving meals. To top off the feast, Culpeper lawyer and businesswoman Monica Chernin, along with her fantastic team of talented home cooks, will return with their amazing Thanksgiving pies.

*(The Swift team helping at Buy-a-Bird 2023)*

The Food Closet's Christmas Box has a retail value of \$65. To keep the boxes affordable, the Food Closet orders food from the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and does some thrifty local shopping.

"We know we have 400 (gift cards) coming from Safeway, and we will use any designated gift card monies to extend that number," Dickerson said. She expects to distribute 800 Christmas boxes to families in need.

A project of this magnitude is expensive. Anyone who wants to contribute to this cause may send checks to the Food Closet at PO Box 343, Culpeper, VA. 22701. Write "Christmas Box" on the memo line. In addition, there will be a heavy social media campaign that includes a QR code for online

donations. Online donations through Paypal may be accessed by the Food Closet website at <https://www.ststephensculpeper.net/culpeper-food-closet/>

“Each donor who gives to Buy a Christmas Box will know they have helped a family during the week between Christmas and New Year’s,” Dickerson said. “These boxes will ease the stress on the families we serve by allowing them extra, good, healthy foods to serve their families.”

Of course, none of this could happen without vast behind-the-scenes help. Dickerson sends a huge THANK YOU to St. Stephen's Episcopal Church for its continuing support, including putting up with a POD for four weeks to house all the Christmas boxes, once packed. And she notes that “none of this good work would be possible without the tireless efforts of more than 80 volunteers who bring in, shelve, work with clients and pack food for our neighbors in need.”

Thank you!

As Bob Dylan wrote in 1963, “The times they are a-changing’.” For the Culpeper Food Closet, we might add, “And a-changin’ for the better.”