



CELEBRATING SIX MONTHS OF COMMUNITY TABLE

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
New Orleans, LA



A Message to New & Old Friends of Bethlehem

One year ago, the Redevelopment Team at Bethlehem had the idea to host a free Thanksgiving meal for our neighborhood. Little did we know that this would be one of the most consequential decisions for our congregation in the past few years.



From that single successful meal came dreams and plans for something more, something that would make a difference for Bethlehem and for our neighborhood.

We've put together this booklet as a way to thank all of you who have donated, volunteered, cleaned, supported, and eaten at Community Table in the past six months.

2020 will forever be defined as the year of the coronavirus, a pandemic that completely changed our plans and lives. Our Bethlehem community has been marked by tragedy through coronavirus in many ways, yet through perseverance, vision, hard work, and the Holy Spirit, we can see that something brilliant and beautiful was born in our community this year.

In the past six months, Bethlehem has served over 10,000 free, no-questions-asked, gourmet meals to our neighborhood.

I want to thank all of you for your support of our congregation and community, and for staying connected to us and our work wherever you are. We're working hard to grow and expand our program, and we hope you'll support us through your prayers, presence, and donations. You're always welcome to email me at grothb@gmail.com. Thanks again for your support, and I hope you enjoy a look behind the scenes of Community Table.

Sincerely,
Rev. Benjamin Groth

Follow us at facebook.com/BethlehemNOLA
for Community Table updates

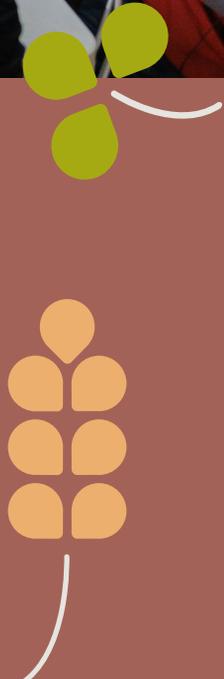
HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: THANKSGIVING MEAL 2019



As we walked around and talked with people, we began to realize that many of our neighbors and community members were living life hungry.

Last summer, we decided to host a "small" free Thanksgiving meal the Sunday before Thanksgiving. The week before, we put out a few signs and walked around the neighborhood inviting people to come and eat.

About twice as many people attended as we expected, and it was then that we began to realize we might have struck on something really important.



PLANNING STAGES



Throughout December, January, and February, we organized meetings to start brainstorming and planning for our new meal. Our initial idea coalesced around offering a free meal each Sunday after worship at noon.

We wanted it to be delicious, free, and an environment where people would be drawn to gather through an attitude of kindness and love.

By having it on Sundays at noon, we also hoped to help break down some of the boundaries between Bethlehem and our neighborhood.

To help plan, we organized several different teams: a cooking team, a serving team, a cleaning team, a fundraising team, and a set-up/tear-down team. We connected with partner congregations who were interested in volunteering and began to organize our first fundraising campaign.



The Name

Originally, we weren't sure what we could call the new meal. But last December, I met Kimberly, who was at Bethlehem volunteering with our partner organization Voces Unidas, Louisiana Immigrants' Rights Coalition. We got to talking, and after I explained that we were thinking about starting a free meal, I learned Kimberly runs her own marketing company and was interested and willing to help us out.

When we met to talk about a fundraising campaign in January, one of the names she suggested that we consider was "Community Table," one that I immediately loved. At our next planning meeting, I brought up the name, and we embraced it as the new name for our free meal program.



**\$8000
GOAL
MET**

\$8000 RAISED!
Final Goal:
\$10,000

**Let's Raise
\$2000 more by
Mardi Gras to
support 500
more free meals!**



Fundraising Time!

In January, we launched a two-month grassroots fundraising campaign to gather the money needed to get Community Table started. Our initial goal was just a few thousand dollars, but as the support continued to roll in, we kept increasing our goals!

When Mardi Gras finally arrived, and with the help of a couple matching gifts, we had raised over \$10,000 to start Community Table, a number truly beyond our expectations.

There's a good chance that if you're reading this that you were one of the over one hundred people who donated to Community Table from across the country. Thank you. This booklet is truly dedicated to you.





CORONAVIRUS

The big plan was to start Community Table the Sunday after Mardi Gras, using the momentum from Mardi Gras season to launch our new program. It worked! We had amazing meals on March 1st and March 8th, including live music from Andre Bohren and Chloe Groth. We had great serving teams and lots of people sitting down to eat together, just like we had dreamed.

Then, with little warning, schools and churches and everything else started closing, and we had to make the difficult decision to cancel our worship services along with our in-person meals.





HOW Community Table became Community Table ToGo

The week before March 15th was a scary week in New Orleans. We were one of the early epicenters of the pandemic and the whole city was being shut down. There were rumors flying around about lockdowns and all sorts of things happening, not to mention large numbers of people who were getting sick and dying.

We made the decision that week to continue Community Table but to transform it into a ToGo meal program because we could see the need for food increasing at a shocking rate in our neighborhood due to the widespread layoffs and unemployment across New Orleans. Our team of volunteers agreed, and so a new chapter of our ministry began.





Our Chef

One of the greatest gifts of the summer was the connection we made with Chef De Wells. Now a cooking instructor with Liberty's Kitchen, Chef De had been laid off from the historic Commanders Palace restaurant along with the rest of the staff when restaurants were forced to close due to the pandemic.

Since her first meal volunteering with Community Table ToGo, Chef De has transformed our program. Bringing a wealth of experience and expertise, as well as a passion for helping people eat delicious food, Community Table would not be the same without her!





OUR PARTNER: GLADEWAVES

They are a major reason why we have been able to become one of the most stable sources of food in our neighborhood.



Our biggest partner in Community Table ToGo has been Gladewaves, an organization dedicated to providing easily accessible, free food in New Orleans.

In January, we were collaborating on a free monthly lunch for seniors, but as we realized the extent of the unemployment and hunger in our neighborhood due to coronavirus, we were able to come up with a new partnership. The Gladewaves partnership provides 150-175 free meals to Community Table ToGo every Friday, which we then distribute.

Our Volunteers

Our volunteers have come to us from every imaginable connection, plus some I would have never dreamed of.

Here are just a few of the ways we've connected with our volunteers:

- Lived around the corner
- Found the church on Facebook
- Saw us post on Reddit
- Ate the meal and came back to help
- Church members
- Partner congregation members
- Friends
- Friends of Friends
- Classmates



More Volunteers



OUR NEIGHBORS



THE FOOD

One of the things that makes Community Table ToGo special is Chef De and the volunteer team's dedication to providing delicious and well-cooked hot meals for our lunches.

Recent meals have featured Thai BBQ ribs, loaded nachos, jerk chicken, tacos, chicken alfredo and more. Each meal, we also cook vegetarian entrees for those who don't eat meat or prefer something different.



THANK YOU

There would be no Community Table without everyone in our church and across the country who has donated to support us.

We would not have food to share without the people, organizations, and churches who have helped Community Table succeed beyond our initial hopes.

You took a chance to support our idea of a new, free, no-questions-asked food ministry at Bethlehem, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, a lot of hard work, much joy, and your contributions, Community Table has grown quickly to be a critical resource and a point of pride in our neighborhood.

Special thanks are due to the Redevelopment and Administrative Teams at Bethlehem, to the many members of the church who helped brainstorm and plan last January and February, to Chef De, Patrick, Allison, Brandon, and to everyone who has volunteered at Community Table and/or Community Table ToGo in the past six months.





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