NEW OCCASIONS TEACH NEW DUTIES, TIME MAKES ANCIENT GOOD UNCOUTh

The old hymn, “Once to Every Man (sic) and Nation,” expresses a profound truth with many applications: “New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth.” The COVID-19 pandemic has borne out the truth of that statement. It was once “good” to gather for worship, hug your fellow believers, sing vigorously, drink from the common cup, but now...not so much. Corey Colborn, a member of Advent Lutheran, Morgan Hill, and a volunteer with their weekly Community Table hot meal ministry, was asked to help serve dinner the first week of COVID-19 social distancing precautions. Normally a sit-down meal prepared and served by volunteers, what would this meal look like and consist of under these new conditions? With a mixture of curiosity and anxiety, Corey agreed to help. His first person report of the experience follows.

In mid-March 2020 the Community Table dinner program at Advent Lutheran in Morgan Hill was in crisis. On short notice the dine-in meal had to switch to take-out only, with all sorts of rules for masks, gloves, and 6 feet physical spacing.

I was called in to volunteer, and I wasn’t sure what to expect. I knew we were handling food, but how it was going to be done I didn’t know. Turns out the other new volunteers were in the same position I was. They had never done full to-go-only service before, and we had to work out how exactly that was going to happen. Some things would happen as they always did; signs would go up, food would be delivered, and volunteers were there ready to work. But would people even come? How were we going to prepare the food boxes?
I found out Advent had done to-go orders for some in the past, and now all the orders would look like that. Utensils and napkins, swaddled together, were prepared before the food arrived. We would have to bag everything to give out to people needing food, and we quickly located grocery bags of all shapes and sizes.

Once the food arrived there was a flurry of activity as all the volunteers sprang into action, accepting the delivery, checking ovens, loading cold drinks into the fridge, and making space for everything else. I stayed out of the kitchen since I didn’t know what was going on. Soon things calmed, and I was tasked with loading various items and utensils into bags while we waited for hot food to be ready to be boxed up. I didn’t want to have anything to do with food prep; bagging the boxes and being a runner suited me just fine!

People started arriving all at once and, again, there was a flurry of activity. I rushed bagged meals to the tables outside for the people to pick up, and then prepped more bags for other guests. The onslaught slowed to a trickle, and I had periods of rest and was able to talk with fellow volunteers. It was St. Patrick’s Day, and I learned that one of the hard-working volunteers was named Patrick Day.

Finally, the shift ended and there was nothing left to do but clean up and take down the signs. We had succeeded where other locations had given up; we had served several dozen hungry people during this first week of the COVID-19 crisis with its shelter-in-place restrictions.

By Corey Colborn
Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.