



Council of
Churches

Together • Spring 2020

From Our Executive Director

The Corinthian Church was in trouble. Factions were squabbling over everything from spiritual gifts to who is an apostle and whose baptism was valid. Sides were taken up and the wagons were circling. Things were getting real, really quick in Corinth.

And so the Apostle Paul writes the church a letter. In the midst of their disagreements, Paul offers them a better way. In that often repeated chapter 13, Paul explains that without love, words are meaningless. He then defines love—it is patient, it's kind, it does not envy, and it isn't puffed up.

But nowhere in this chapter does Paul mention God. This is kind of curious since throughout his entire argument up until this point he keeps mentioning his faith in Jesus and how God is to be worshiped. But then he comes to this chapter and doesn't mention God at all. Why?

One plausible answer is that when we are reading about love, we are finally understanding the fundamental nature of God. Since God is love, God is kind, God is patient, God doesn't envy, and God isn't puffed up. This love that is expressed in God is very tangible. It's practical and real—not merely the sentiments on a Hallmark Card.

In many ways this is the rationale behind the work you make possible at the Council. The Council of Churches “connects compassion with needs.” This is because we believe that love is real when it expresses itself in action. Without practical expressions of love, faith is ultimately meaningless. So when together you donate 2.1 million meals to food programs in our area, you can see it as 2.1 million meals of love. All the miles you drive, the wheel chair ramps you build, the prayers you offer, the 70,000 volunteer hours that are done each year—all are expressions of love. This is love made real because you are connecting true compassion with community needs. And all of these actions of love help us understand a little more clearly what God is like.

Thank you for putting your love into action by supporting the Council of Churches. You are a beautiful picture of God's love to those who need it most in the community.

Peace and towels,

Rev. Dr. Joe Sellepack



The Northside Market is opening Summer 2020!

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2019 was a banner year for CHOW®! We distributed over 2.1 million meals to our neighbors all across Broome County. That couldn't have been done without all of you who ran food pantries and community meals, donated food, held food drives, and volunteered in the warehouse—**THANK YOU!** Because of the success of 2019, I'm looking forward to an even better year in 2020! But before I get into that, I'd like to introduce myself.

My name is Les Aylesworth, and I am the incoming Director of CHOW®. I'm a local, having been born and raised in Endicott, NY. Before I came to the Council, I worked in both business and church settings, so I am excited to be here at CHOW® where I can blend both experiences. I'm also excited to be in a job where I can help others. Growing up, my family was poor, so I know what it's like to go to bed hungry just wishing the hunger pangs would go away. I have no idea for sure, but I imagine my family probably utilized food pantries as I grew up. Thankfully that is in my past, but I've never forgotten. For that reason alone, I'm excited for the opportunity to help children and people who are in similar situations as the one I grew up in.

As we look forward to what's in store for CHOW® this year, the Council's theme of "Connecting compassion with community needs" is the perfect summary statement. When you give to CHOW®, you are putting compassion into action in a very real way. Last year, you provided over **2.1 million meals** to neighbors in Broome County. You helped recover **1.6 million pounds of food**

from being thrown away in landfills, instead distributing it to community meal sites. You tackled the root causes of hunger by providing **35 adults with job training** and life skills classes in order to find meaningful employment. You distributed **30,000 meals to kids** over the summer who rely on free and reduced lunch during the school year. Basically, you met a lot of community needs!

This year as you put your compassion into action, I'm convinced that we will be able to positively impact even more lives.

-Les Aylesworth, Director of CHOW®



Faith in Action Volunteers



"No one wants to need assistance, but it is so good for my heart to know that you all are so giving and loving. I am grateful for your thoughtful gifts and compassionate actions." -FIAV services recipient

We often speak about statistics because the numbers provide proof of our program's success. However, I feel the stories behind the stats provide a much better picture. Last year our volunteer drivers provided over 1,500 rides for seniors who can no longer drive and need help getting to their medical appointments. *"Thank you so much for several recent rides to doctor appointments. When my friends and neighbors were scared off by the winter weather, your volunteers took over!"* FIAV services recipient



Shopper Program: volunteers drove over 6,000 miles to make sure homebound older adults would have groceries and other incidentals. Besides providing a shopping service, the Shopper Program is an opportunity for isolated seniors to connect and form relationships with caring people. One Shopper Program participant says: *"My shopper is so wonderful to me. I just love her and look forward to the time she spends with me and shopping!"*



Chop & Chat fought food insecurity and social isolation among seniors by providing over 1,400 meals at 8 locations. With the help of volunteers we were able to directly impact participants' health and increase their social ties and feelings of self-worth. Larese Isaacson, the Chop & Chat Coordinator, says of one participant: *"It made her day that someone sat with her and took the time to care."*

Ramp It Up finished the 2019 season with 16 ramps. Built by youth volunteers and mentors on a weekend, these ramps provide people with mobility issues not only freedom, but a brighter outlook on life. *"The amount of work you do and the quality of work you do in such a short period of time is stunning. It left us breathless and speaks to the limitless power of faith and community."* -Son of a ramp recipient

Lately, it seems like the phrase "Be Kind" can be seen everywhere; on signs, tee-shirts and Facebook posts. In a world that can feel cold and uncaring, our volunteers connect compassion with community needs everyday. Kindness and compassion are the driving force behind all they do for *Faith and Action* Volunteers and the older adults in our community.

- Susan Spencer, Director, *Faith in Action Volunteers*

Jail Ministry



People sometimes will ask us why we do Jail Ministry. One of the hundreds of reasons is a sweet man named Kyle. Recently, as we were walking from the Chaplain's Office to do a worship service at one of the jail's housing units, we saw Kyle walking toward us from the opposite direction; he was carefully doing his assigned job at the facility, sweeping the dust and dirt from the hallway floors. We noticed that he had a gigantic smile radiating from his face, a gift obviously intended just for us as he stopped and said, "You know I'm gettin' out of here in March, and I believe it is really gonna work out this time - and I owe it all to God and to

you. You have taken time to talk with me, pray with me, care for me, and help me to see that I am a good person. I just want to say thank you - and also to tell you that I am praying for you, too!" Kyle's big smile and his loving words remind us DAILY that God's fidelity comes through every person everywhere and at the most surprisingly sweet moments. Thank you, God, and thank you, Kyle!

-Rev. Dr. Cris Mogenson, Jail Ministry Program Director

Hospital Ministry



Oftentimes while ministering in our local hospitals, I am amazed at the "interconnectedness" that seems to exist. The Hospital Ministry is a unique way of connecting compassion with community needs. While doctors and nurses attend to patients' physical needs, we are able to attend to spiritual needs by providing comfort, companionship, and support during life's most difficult moments. Those of you who give towards the Hospital Ministry know that such support is crucial. You truly connect your compassion with community needs when you give towards the Hospital Ministry.

A few examples from the past month illustrate the impact of your compassion:

- A hospitalized grandmother received prayer and reassurance during her time of need.
- Hospitalized veterans received specialized materials for encouragement and hope.
- A depressed individual was given Scripture verses and a Bible of his own to strengthen him and boost his mood before surgery.

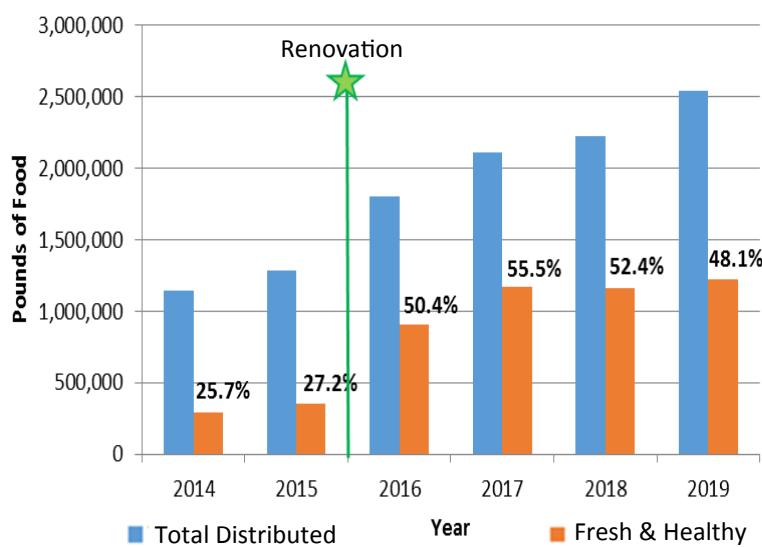


These are just a few examples of how you've connected compassion with community needs by giving to the Hospital Ministry. I wish you could hear the stories of each person that has been ministered to, but I can tell you this—the Hospital Ministry meets a real need in our local hospitals. There is no purer form of compassion than encouraging and visiting the sick. Thank you for connecting compassion with community needs by supporting the Hospital Ministry. - Chaplain John Koopman, Director of the Hospital Ministry

Your Impact:

It is hard to believe that it has been almost 4 years since many individuals, businesses, congregations, and foundations made it possible to renovate the CHOW® warehouse. Each year, because of your generosity, CHOW® has been able to help more neighbors right here in Broome County.

Food Distributed by CHOW® (2014-2019)



The warehouse renovations have allowed us to keep up with the demand in the community by distributing nearly an **additional 1.4 million pounds of food** in 2019 compared to 2014. CHOW® has also been able to significantly increase the amount of fresh and healthy foods being distributed annually. **Fresh and healthy foods now account for nearly half of the total food distributed by CHOW®.**

All of this would not be possible without the trust that you placed in CHOW® so that together we could help our neighbors. [Thank you for your partnership in helping create a healthier community.](#)

-Rev. Dr. Joseph Sellepack, Executive Director



Council of Churches

2019 Snapshot



2,100,000

Meals provided to neighbors in need

35



Adults received job training and life skills classes through CHOW Works program



16

Ramps built to provide home access and independence

300



Older adults received services to remain independent and healthy & maintain quality of life



2,000

People incarcerated received planning services and spiritual support



Cooperative arts program and family literacy program helped inmates stay connected with their children.



16,000

Patients, families, and staff members received support



Chaplains gathered resources and provided spiritual support for patients, families, and staff.



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Broome County Council of Churches

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Send your email address with your request to Barbara at: bcook@broomecouncil.net

The Northside Grocery Store

The Council's North Side Grocery Store project is well underway and set to open this summer. For those who are unfamiliar, Binghamton's north side has been without a proper grocery store for nearly 25 years. The absence of a grocery store forces residents to do their shopping at dollar stores, gas stations, or absorb the cost of transportation. The Council of Churches along with a growing list of partners including the City of Binghamton has been working for over two years now to solve this problem and provide north side residents with a grocery store that focuses on fresh, healthy, and affordable items within walking distance. This hard work is finally paying off as **this summer we will be opening a social purpose (profits reinvested into our mission) grocery store at 435 State Street.** The 5,000+ square foot store will provide those in need with access to affordable groceries while the profits go to support the various programs of the Council like CHOW® and Faith in Action. As you read this, the brand new building, which will also be home to three floors of affordable housing is being constructed. The building is completely framed in and come March, we will begin to install coolers, freezers, and all other necessary equipment needed to serve our community. Please feel free to reach out to us with any questions you may have about the store or how you can get involved once we open our doors. - Jack Seman, Store Manager



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