

NEWS

CARDINAL BLESSES NEW FOOD PANTRY

BY ANTHONY CAMMALLERI | October 6, 2022



Beth Chambers, vice president of basic needs for Catholic Charities, gives Cardinal Seán O'Malley a tour of the new food pantry on Silsbee Street in Lynn. (Spenser Hasak)

LYNN — Catholic Charities of Boston, in partnership with Greater Lynn Senior Services (GLSS) and Lynn's Food Security Task Force, opened the doors to its new 3,600 square-foot food pantry on 8 Silsbee Street Thursday morning.

In the parking lot in front of the food pantry, a herd of teenagers from St. Mary's College Prep School snacked on doughnuts and apple cider, Archbishop of Boston Séan O'Malley spoke about the need to address food insecurity, before leading an opening prayer to bless the pantry.

"We know that one in five residents of Lynn have experienced food insecurity, which leads to higher occurrences of chronic illnesses and so many other problems. Most school families here qualify for free or subsidized lunch. We know that hunger profoundly affects children's ability to learn to thrive, and to be healthy," O'Malley said.

Even though food insecurity is not a particularly new issue, Catholic Charities of Boston's Vice President of Basic Needs Beth Chambers said that today's economy puts more and more pressure on families to make ends meet, and with food prices rising, her organization wanted to help.

"I heard the story just last night about the price of gas and oil going up. Those are costs that are going to be consumed by families, so if we can do something here to help them and do it with dignity, then we'll do it with just a feeling that our job is to serve those in need," Chambers said.

Following brief remarks from Mayor Jared Nicholson and Catholic Charities of Boston's President and CEO Kevin MacKenzie, O'Malley, Nicholson, Sen. Brendan Crighton, and Rep. Daniel Cahill led the first tour group through the facility.

The pantry, Director of Elder Services Christopher Gomez noted, had a bountiful supply of foods across all cultures, with six-foot tall shelves stacked with rice, beans, cereals, and soups of all sorts in the facility's center. Refrigerators lined the walls with seemingly endless produce, dairy, and bottled water.

While those walking through the pantry looked around the walk-in cornucopia, many stopped before a sign spelling out the pantry's estimated outputs within its first year of operation: 10,400 people fed, 250 families served daily, and 217,000 meals provided.

Leader of the Food Security Task Force and Public Health Coordinator Norris Guscott said that while the pantry site served as a significant step toward combating food insecurity, the site will soon become a larger-scale hub for food, cooking, education, storage, and a number of food security-related uses.

“This pantry is one vital piece to Phoenix food hub as a whole, and we’re waiting and eagerly anticipating the other portions of Phoenix to open,” Guscott said. “The state-of-the art teaching kitchen, which will be built from the ground up meant for demonstrative purposes... We’ve got programming space, we’ve got food storage space, there’s lots of exciting things to come with today.”

Nicholson also mentioned the Phoenix Food Hub in his speech, in which he said that the city, with the right partners, planning, and resources, can tackle the issue of hunger and food insecurity within Lynn.

“It is just absolutely clear that here in 2022, we have the means to address these issues, to address hunger in our communities, and it’s about having a vision and an ability to execute on that vision,” Nicholson said. “There’s some tremendous partners in this effort. Phoenix Food Hub is such an innovative step forward in our work to tackle hunger and Greater Lynn Senior Services has done amazing work on this and we’re so grateful for their collaboration.”

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