

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Petersburg, VA



Sunday & Thursday “Brown Bag Feeding” for the Surrounding Petersburg Community (2017-2021)

St. Stephen's “Brown Bag Feeding” began in 2017, as a one-person sponsored Sunday-after-service effort providing brown bags containing one meal -- a sandwich, fresh fruit, potato chips, cookies and a bottle of water – for non-member neighbors and community people who received a face-to-face outreach invitation (a flier & a verbal request) to come to St. Stephen's and pick up a “FREE” bag of food. Over a period of 4 years, this evolved into a two-person led effort, then a four-person effort with a number of church members periodically supplying various food items. Later a partnership was formed between St. Stephen's and the Chesterfield Food Bank with the church making annual contributions to the Food Bank and the Food Bank providing pounds of canned goods. The single-meal sandwich menu changed to “Free” canned goods (often with free can openers) providing approximately five meals per distributed bag.

Our food distributions moved to Thursdays, twice a month. Face-to-face outreach with its opportunity to explain the program and answer questions, was an essential core feature of this effort in view of the City of Petersburg's continuing adult low-literacy and high poverty rates, and as an intentional focus on fostering a deeper connection between the Church and the surrounding community. Direct outreach was supplemented by: plain language clipart fliers handed out two days before each event, and exterior signs around the church announcing distribution days and times. A cooperative planning and support relationship developed with the Children's Food distribution program with which we shared space in the church Parish Hall. Despite COVID-19, the one-to-one two day advance flier distribution continued until around January, 2021. Typically, the average number of meals distributed per month ranged from 600-750.

5/9/23