

Spotlight on Crestwood The Blessing Boxes

The most interesting things about writing the Spotlight articles are the surprises I find. Just when I think I understand something, I find there are many more layers to the story. So it was as I revisited the Blessing Box and the new book box beside it.

The unobtrusive cabinets are located under the South portico at the entrance closest to Glendover. You probably see them each Sunday. I asked, What are they? Who uses them? Who makes them work? This is obviously a successful ministry, but the fact that they are so low-key, and there are many unanswered questions, make it more fascinating and Christ-like.



Food Blessing Box

According to Rev. Trish Standifur, the Blessing Box was the brainchild of Saralyn Kingsolver about the time that Covid was hitting the community hard in 2020. People were out of work and hungry. Some Crestwood women decided to leave some food outside the church. Martha Seithers took the lead in organizing the efforts, which grew over time. Today, led by Martha, six dedicated women take turns daily restocking the box with food.

What is impressive is that this is a project done from the heart with little interaction with the recipients. That is a conscious decision. Unlike other community outreach projects, there are no stipulations to getting the food. There is almost no knowledge about who uses the help. In fact, if someone comes up to get supplies, members fade into the background to give them privacy. People in need can come to the box 24 hours a day and help themselves, no questions asked. Interestingly, people do not take advantage of the project. Instead, they generally seem to take just enough each visit to provide a meal or two for their needs, leaving items for the next people.

I had assumed the recipients would be young struggling mothers. But from what little is known, it appears the "customers" represent a wide range of ages and genders. They are appreciative, and at times try to give back. Recently a gentleman was spotted taking a few cans of food and, in return, leaving a donation of a few books in the book box. Some leave behind thank you notes.

One woman left a note explaining she regularly receives a food box from another area church. But she is unable to eat meat products so she leaves us the items she cannot use while taking a few vegetarian items from the Blessing Box. She says she is appreciative.

The Blessing Box is stocked with donations from Crestwood members and with a stipend from our Local Outreach Committee. Periodically, Rev. Standifur places a large grocery order which is stored in a closet in the administration wing and in a black cabinet near the box for convenience for the ladies who keep it stocked.

Another puzzle is how people know about its existence. The neighborhood around Bellefonte does not seem to be a logical location for a food box. But the location has spread by word of mouth as far as the group can tell. At the beginning they notified the Glendover Elementary Resource Center about the box. They posted once on NEXTDOOR about the location. And once, the newspaper listed locations for possible food donations, and somehow Crestwood's Blessing Box was on the list. Apparently, when good things happen, the word gets spread.

Although Covid difficulties are lessening, there is still obviously a need for food, and Martha Seithers and her dedicated crew continue their silent mission to the community. Member contributions are always needed – canned meats, beans, soup, canned fruit, pasta and sauce are among the most popular items.

Book Blessing

Recently, another cabinet has been added. Assuming there were a lot of young families coming for food, members of the newly-named Bradford Class felt that books in the homes of children are important for their growth. Perhaps the adults would like books, too. The project is still a work in progress as we figure out the needs of the mostly invisible clients. I confess I am part of this class and effort.

We've been at it several months and have found that the children's books are taken, but the adult books are multiplying like rabbits. We don't know where they are coming from, and are having trouble keeping a semblance of organization in our little box.

So, at least for a while, we are going to concentrate on children's books. Parent's Day Out gave us a generous stack of good-quality children's books, but we would like to accumulate more. We have noticed that activity books and coloring books with small boxes of crayons disappear immediately. We want to keep some popular easy-reading books for older children as well. We will need donations, so keep us in mind as you see used, good-quality books for children.

We started out with a warm, caring story. I stopped by a local yard sale and found a bin of children's books. A young boy about 10-years-old was selling his childhood books to raise money for a wanted item. When I shared what we were buying them for, he refused any money and said he wanted to give them to children who didn't have any books. He was adamant in his giving.

As to the generously donated adult paperbacks and academic-type books, we found new and useful homes for them. We thank the kind, thoughtful donors even though we are now taking a somewhat different direction.

A set of bookends mysteriously appeared on top of the cabinet along with more books. Perhaps some adult-type books can be placed there. Books on parenting and recipes for low-budgets meals are an idea. Maybe even an occasional best-seller paperback could be added.

With the Book Box we are feeling our way, just as the Blessing Box people did a couple of years ago. Their project was started with faith and trust. We are proceeding that way with the books. We will eventually find out if there is a need, and where the need is.

What can you do to help? Both groups need donations. And you can send up a prayer for the unknown people who show up outside Crestwood's door night and day. We pray for a community where all needs are naturally fulfilled, but until then Crestwood continues to offer extra sustenance for the body, mind, and soul.

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together.

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