

Diaper Bank Ministry at Christ Church United Church of Christ, Elizabethtown, PA.

There are so many needs in our community. One was literally at our doorstep. Actually, right in our parking lot. WIC (Women Infants & Children) was looking for a location to be a presence in the Elizabethtown area. Our church parking lot sits on a major thoroughfare through town, a bus route and almost across the street from the local foodbank. The mobile outreach of WIC, WOW (WIC on Wheels) began serving clients here in January 2016 on Thursdays for a half day schedule. The Outreach team at Christ Church agreed that it was important to somehow support the clients of WOW. How could we share the love of Christ in a meaningful way? This thought bounced around my head for several weeks. I wanted the families' first impression of Christ Church to be about people, not the beautiful windows, bricks and macadam. Not of judgement but generosity. After speaking to the WIC staff, a need was clear and obvious. Diapers.

The number one question the staff receive is "where can we get diapers?" WIC does not provide them, you cannot purchase them with SNAP benefits and food pantries typically do not carry them with regularity or selection. So, instead of changing a diaper regularly and when needed, children wear a dirty diaper for longer than they should. Not a healthy choice, but sometimes it's the only choice when faced with the decision to fill your gas tank to get to work or buy a package of diapers. So, enlisting the support and help of the congregation, we began collecting diapers. In July 2016 we began distributing those diapers. Our goal was to provide a weeks worth of diapers to 5 to 6 children a week.

Fast forward to October 2017. WOW has gone from half days to full days each Thursday. In the first six month of this outreach we provided diapers to 152 children, (4-5 weekly avg.). Since January 2017 to present, we have provided diapers to 400 children (11 weekly avg.) through WIC on Wheels.

In addition to WOW, we are now working with our local food pantry to identify those families with children in diapers and providing diapers for them as well. This partnership began in March 2017 and to date, we have provided an additional 45 children with diapers. We distribute through these agencies because they have the means for a more comprehensive approach to support at risk families. They are already screening for need and eligibility (based on federal poverty guidelines). Diapers are an expensive commodity; each donation of a package of diapers and baby wipes has an approximate \$10 value. We are trying to be responsible with this limited resource. Our congregation donates 90% of our stock and at any given time we are carrying about a 2 – 3 week supply. The Diaper Bank has also honored requests from the Elizabethtown Child Care Center which enrolls subsidized children, as well as our local state representative's office and a neighboring school district. Eleven additional children have been impacted by these distributions. We have been identified as a (non-funded) partner with the United Way and the Elizabethtown Area HUB providing a gap service to the community.

There have been growing pains. Our storage was initially an outdoor shed and the first winter the baby wipes all froze. Snow and rain created access difficulties. We now have a small climate controlled room in our lower level. The need for donations has increased greatly and we are actively courting community and local church involvement. As the diaper distribution is a set day and time and requires lifting and stairs, volunteer engagement is somewhat difficult.

But, there has also been much joy. A young member of our congregation asking for diapers instead of toys for her birthday party. An anonymous donor in the checkout line at Target throwing a \$100 bill towards a purchase for the diaper bank. The tangible evidence of a congregation stepping up and meeting a need. The renewal of faith in humanity recharged regularly.

In writing this piece, I looked back over my initial proposal and had to laugh because I stated that the management of this program would not be very complicated or time consuming. I could never have imagined the impact that a simple package of diapers and baby wipes could make.

