

Christmas Hamper Programs...Reinvented and Improved

St. John the Divine Conference in London challenged themselves on how to create a better experience of their traditional Christmas Hamper program for both the families served and the Vincentians involved. Below is a summary of their efforts to Reinvent and Improve their Christmas Hamper Program.

1. How did your Christmas Program operate before?

Prior to the change in the model, our Conference was pre-building the Hampers before Distribution. The Hampers were put together based on the number in the family, and how many children etc. they had. Then the Day of Distribution, the families would come and pick up their pre-boxed Hamper.

2. Why did you feel the need to change the program? What were the key decision points that helped you assess the need to make a change?

The Christmas Hamper Program ran quite well before this and the idea to change the program came from the thought of giving the families the choice on what food they wanted. This was a proposed idea that I thought we could try for one year - to see how much work (extra) and if it didn't work out, we would revert back to the original way.

3. Provide details about how your new program operates.

The new program operates in a "Market/Grocery Store" concept where we setup the parish Hall as a Market with all the variety of foods. The families are then scheduled to come in during a Saturday morning - they have to pre register ahead of time. They come on the Saturday morning and proceed through the process.

- o They first sign in/get registered.
- o If they have children, the parents get to go through our "Toy Store" where items are setup in age groups where they are able to select a toy for their children.
- o Then they proceed through the Market where they are met by one of our Volunteers who we call a Personal Shopper. The Personal shopper then grabs a grocery cart and with the family walk them around the Market where the families can select the food they would like. We have Volunteers (Store Clerks) behind each table to welcome them as well and to restock the tables.
- o Once they have completed the shopping experience, they are greeted at the exit doors with volunteers who load up their vehicle.

4. What were the challenges to change from the 'old' hamper preparation system to the 'new' system? How did you overcome these challenges?

A challenge we encountered with the new program was ensuring that we had enough volunteers on the distribution day as we anticipated that it would take more than just having people pre-pack boxes. I

reached out to the full parish community to see if others wanted to assist which added to our volunteer base.

Another challenge was ensuring that we had enough of the same food items. We overcame this in a couple of ways, by trying to ensure we counted what we had, especially for high volume items. But then we also decided that what we had was what we had to give (i.e. if we ran out that was ok). We also introduced a Parish Food Donation drive in November and asked for "Most Needed Items".

5. What was the response by those involved to the changes?

a. Your Vincentians

The initial response by our Vincentians when I first posed the idea was very mixed, and I had some very strong opinions that it wouldn't work because it was going to take too long, we were not going to have enough volunteers, and the overall concept didn't make sense. But I also had members that thought it was a good idea and wanted to try it out for at least 1 year; others that I think were in the middle and were supportive but due to the unknown, they weren't convinced it would work.

The response now after we have done this new program for 2 years is that the Vincentians enjoy it and understand what dignity we are providing to the families we serve. They notice that there is more interaction and conversations with the families.

b. Families you serve

We received good feedback from the families we serve and they enjoy the fact they can choose. If they have to wait, that is no problem. Again, I think it gives them the dignity.

Overall, the program could not be executed without the volunteers. It is a long morning for the group, but I believe everyone appreciates being involved and understands the benefits they are giving back. We try to tweak the process each year to make it more efficient.

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