

June 3, 2009
To: Presbytery Newsletter
From: Island Presbyterian Church

Island Presbyterian Church Begins Bread Ministry

One snowy evening in January, Pastor Nader Awad was having a bite to eat at Panera Bread on Niagara Falls Boulevard when he got to talking to the manager, David Almond, about what happens to the breads, pastries, and cookies that are left at the end of the day. Each Panera Bread branch, David said, bakes everything fresh every day, and each night they donate all of their unsold baked goods to charity organizations. David said he had succeeded in scheduling a community group to pick up every night of the week except Wednesday, and he was hoping to fill that slot as well, in order to avoid having to throw out food that was still fresh.

Nader called some of the elders at Island Presbyterian and asked whether we might take on the job of picking up the bread and redistributing it to local food pantries. The immediate response was “Yes, we’ll give it a try!” Our first pick-up was on January 14, when we received a donation of \$1,400 worth of baked goods. We took it to the Niagara Community Mission the next morning, but the staggering amount was more than they could use in one day. So we started making calls to other mission sites.

Pretty soon we were dividing the baked goods among the Niagara Community Mission, First Step Center, Heart & Soul soup kitchen, a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous that meets in our building, and Carolyn’s House, a YMCA-sponsored shelter for low-income women and children.

In May, all of the Panera Bread stores replaced their dishes and donated their old ones. We received dozens of plates, mugs, bowls and trays from the Niagara Falls Blvd. store, and we’re currently making calls to our mission sites to find out where these items are most needed.

We’ve built a team of volunteers who take turns each week picking up the donation at Panera on Wednesday nights, sorting it out at the church, and delivering to the missions on Thursday mornings. These volunteers have been wonderfully generous with their time and enthusiasm about our Bread Ministry. This has truly been a blessing to our church, a chance to share fellowship and share the abundance of our community with those who are in need. We are deeply grateful to David and Panera Bread for giving us this opportunity.

Based on our experience, we encourage the churches in the Western New York Presbytery to find out if there’s a Panera Bread or any bakery or grocery store in your community that has a policy of giving away food for charity organizations.

Carolyn McKibben