

## TO MARKET, TO MARKET

### New transformative food pantry ministries thrive

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The idea behind the market-style model of the church food pantry is pretty simple: instead of providing a bag of pre-packaged dry goods for visitors, they get to peruse a selection of food. Guests have the freedom of choice. Many of these market-style models focus on offering as many healthy alternatives as possible, including plenty of fresh produce. Most receive donations from local restaurants or grocery stores, too. It's a model that focuses on quality and connection, and churches in the Diocese are taking the steps to transform their pantries and offer a new level of service and accessibility in their communities.

#### ST. GEORGE'S, FREDERICKSBURG

Before opening the doors of the Table Food Pantry at St. George's, Fredericksburg, volunteers join the line of guests waiting outside for a group prayer. "It's a really amazing experience," said Carey Chirico, director of children's ministries and outreach ministries for St. George's. One week, the head of the local food bank joined the group, praying first in Arabic, then in English, then in Spanish. "We are super-intentional that we want to create community," explained Chirico. And that means inviting guests to become pantry volunteers, providing a welcoming atmosphere and making real connections with the pantry clients.

For years, St. George's operated on what they called the "emergency food pantry" model, providing dry goods and

pre-packaged food to tide people over in crisis situations. About a year ago, though, several pieces fell into place that transformed their model. The local food bank received a truck, enabling them to make more frequent deliveries. And Chirico read a book by Sarah Miles, one of the founders of the market-style movement in San Francisco. "I loved the theology," said Chirico.

At the Food Table, guests are checked-in via a system called Charity Tracker, then escorted around a horseshoe-shaped table full of food and produce. "We wanted people to be able to choose freely," explained Chirico. "We felt that choice is something that gets taken away from you when you're very poor, so we wanted that element to be put back in."



The market-style pantry at St. George's, Fredericksburg is open for business.