

Churches Join Forces and Feed Community

Jackie Riebel of Peters Township said she and some friends were talking at breakfast one morning about ways their respective churches could become more involved with their local communities and help others in need.

Out of that conversation, members of the Peters Creek United Presbyterian Church and Thomas Presbyterian Church started the Food and Friends program and in less than a year, it has grown from serving 12 people to over 70 people on a bi-weekly basis. Held on the first and third Thursday of every month from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at Thomas Presbyterian Church, the program provides attendees with a hot meal, which includes a meat, vegetable, starch and dessert.

There are not any financial guidelines and a person does not have to be a member of one of the churches to take advantage of a free meal. All they have to do is show up.

"People come for a number of reasons," Riebel said. "It could be because a person finds themselves in a bad financial situation and needs a hot meal or because a person lives alone and needs to socialize with others."

The Food and Friends program has served individuals, couples and entire families, and there are even groups of senior citizens who come to a meal every other week. The program relies on grants, support from the churches, and other donations to meet food and drink expenses.

There are no personnel costs associated with the program since everything – planning the meals, food shopping, cooking, and cleaning up – is all done by a dedicated group of volunteers.

"We do leave a donation box on the table in the front of the room for anyone who wants to make a voluntary donation to the program," Riebel said.

She said the Food and Friends program offers balanced, nutritious meals and will sometimes have meals that are designed around holidays, such as St. Patrick's Day, or a picnic/cook-out during the warmer months.

If you are interested in learning more about the program or becoming a volunteer, stop by the Thomas Presbyterian Church on the first or third Thursday of the month and speak with any one of the program's volunteers.



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