

DATE: July 28, 2023

TO: High Plains Region of the Episcopal Church

FROM: The Backpack Ministry of Christ's Episcopal Church, Castle Rock

On behalf of the Castle Rock Elementary (CRE) students for whom we provided weekend meals, our Backpack Ministry team and the clergy and staff of Christ's Episcopal Church (CEC), I thank you for awarding us a High Plains Region grant. On the day we received the first installment, students were returning from Christmas break and our team was gearing up to resume our weekly routine of restocking pantry shelves and packing and delivering food bags to the school. Soon, we were all counting down the days until the last school day. Summer is just weeks old yet we are counting the days until the 2023-2024



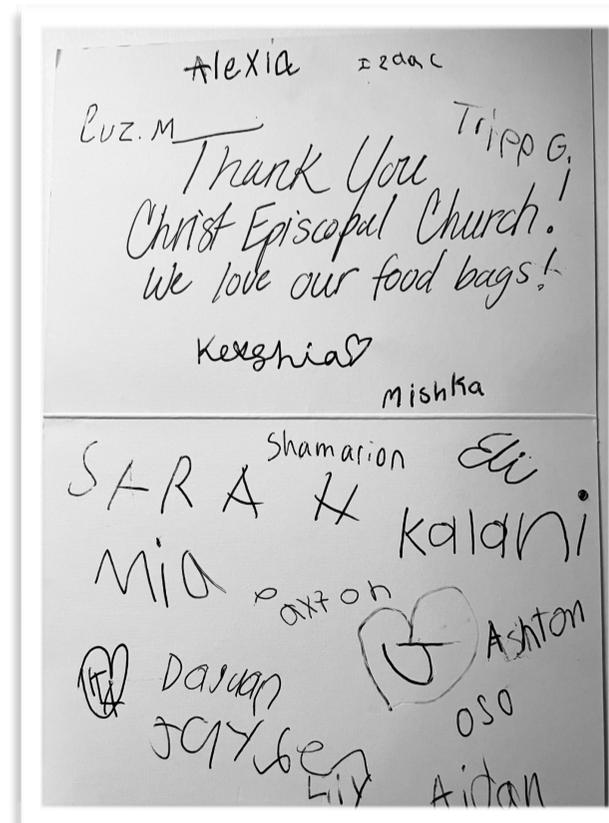
school year begins on August 8th.

Castle Rock Elementary awaits the first day of the 2023-2024 school year.

In alignment with the Regional and Diocesan Missional Initiatives, we positively impact the children and families of Castle Rock Elementary School by providing weekend meals to those students in greatest need. Douglas County boasts 3-4% of its population lives at or below poverty level, in contrast to 30% of CRE families. Rated as one of the best places in the United States to live, Castle Rock has experienced an explosive population growth (52% over the last 10 years). The average cost of living has landed our town in the top 16% of the most expensive cities in the world. The High Plains Region grant helped our ministry meet the growing need through the end of school (May 24th). The second installment will serve as seed money for fall 2023.

Since 2016, at the beginning of each school year, CRE faculty and staff work with parents to enroll those students of greatest need in our program. We began the 2022-2023 school year serving 30 students, by Thanksgiving the number had grown to 38 (9% of the student body). Several families enrolled two children but most were only children ages 5-12 years old. Sadly, according to Assistant Principal Tony Lamb, this number could have easily grown to 50-60 or 12-14% of the student body. This can be attributed to the influx of emigrant and minority families who have limited access to other local resources for various reasons such as transportation and documentation. It is well proven that hunger hinders learning, and school meal programs are only able to provide meals for students experiencing food insecurity during the school week, leaving children hungry on weekends.

Our food pantry is located in a small space in the parish office. During the last school year, our 18-member team packed around 1,160 bags containing 7700 meals. Each bag held shelf stable milk, breakfast, lunch and dinner items plus fruit cup, snacks and desserts. Grant money coupled with generous donations of 23 parishioners contributed to more efficient inventory management; cost per bag varied \$10-\$13 according to assortment.



Recognizing the increasing need for our ministry, prompted a review of our financial and volunteer resources as well as physical space. We determined the time had come to explore financial support beyond our congregation, thus our first application for a High Plains Grant in Fall 2022; we plan to submit a 2023 application. We have submitted an additional grant application to the Philip S Miller Resource Foundation administered by the town of Castle Rock.

Although, our parishioners are very generous, grant monies are essential to sustain our ministry. During the spring term, we received cash gifts from our members ranging from \$5-\$1500 and \$2050 in gifts-in-kind. Coupled with the January grant we were able to begin restocking the pantry July 24th. The August 1st installment will provide over half of the seed money for the fall term.



One of 18 ministry team members, Steve Vecchione packs food bags. In the right corner is a glimpse of our food pantry formerly the front porch of the home which now houses our parish office.



Sam's Club, Walmart and Costco

are the main resources for our shelf



stable food items.

A sample food bag on display.

The outreach ministries of Christ's Episcopal Church focus on food security and the needs of the unhoused. Our weekly backpack ministry is just one way we fulfill our mission to share God's Love through service. We are a smaller parish who answered a call from a smaller elementary school in our neighborhood. Believing we are blessed to be a blessing, it is our duty and privilege to make a difference in the lives of those we serve.