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Churches offer free breakfasts to students

By MICKEY POWELL | The Winchester Star
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BERRYVILLE — Two churches in Clarke County are offering free breakfasts and lunches this summer to students whose families have financial hardships.

Families can stop by either Christ Church at 809 Bishop Meade Road in Millwood or Duncan Memorial United Methodist Church at 210 E. Main St. in Berryville from 1 to 3 p.m. on Sundays to pick up seven days' worth of food at one time. The food ranges from fresh fruits and vegetables and lunch meats to simple meals children can easily prepare while their parents are working.

The program will continue through mid-August, said the Rev. Matt Rhodes, priest-in-charge of the Cunningham Chapel Parish.

Christ Church, which is part of Cunningham Chapel Parish, and Duncan Memorial are partnering to provide the meal service via their food pantries.

So far this summer, between five and 15 families have stopped by Christ Church each Sunday to pick up food, while the number stopping by Duncan Memorial typically has ranged from the low 30s to the low 40s, Rhodes said. He added that he believes more families are stopping by Duncan Memorial "because of the centrality of Berryville" within Clarke County. The churches are pleased at the numbers. Rhodes said the service is needed because many families rely on breakfasts and lunches served at the schools in order for their children to have nutritious meals, yet those meals are unavailable in the summer when schools are closed.

"It's good that it's [the program] doing well," he said. "But it's one of those double-edge swords. It's unfortunate that families have to rely on" food pantries for their children to eat healthily.

According to Rhodes, the churches buy some of the food provided to students and their families. Yet much of it is donated by members of the community as well as area farms, supermarkets and bakeries, based on what they have left over to contribute.

Still, “we’ve found that people are extremely generous,” he said.

Kim Ragland, owner of the Boyd’s Nest Family Restaurant in downtown Berryville, said her restaurant has prepared fresh foods ranging from hamburgers to sausage patties that have been handed out to families at Duncan Memorial. The food has been frozen so it could last up to a week as part of meal kits, she said.

“Our customers have funded more than \$5,000 worth of food for those meals,” Ragland noted.

The churches’ food pantries are arranged much like a supermarket. Families go around and gather the items they want for their children. Volunteers then bag the items and can even carry them to families’ vehicles and load them, Rhodes said.

To meet U.S. Department of Agriculture requirements, he said, families must register when they start receiving food from the churches, and they must provide information about their financial situations.

“But people should not be concerned about that,” said Rhodes — if they really need food, they will get it.

“Our biggest concern is helping families who need it,” he said.

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