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Harlem Food Bank Hit Hard

Written by [NY Press](#) on **November 21, 2012**. Posted in [News & Features](#) [West Side Spirit](#), [West Side Spirit](#).

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By Amy Eley

At 8:30 a.m. on a recent Saturday in Harlem, a man stood near the Antioch Church of God in Christ's painted red steps, shouting a new number every few minutes. "Fifty-one!"

A crowd outside the church talked among themselves quietly, filling the air with clouds of breath in the cool temperatures, continually listening with one ear for their number to be called. "Fifty-two!" "The earlier you come, the better stuff you get," Eugenio Prado explained. "You come later, you get leftovers. But you always get something."

The Antioch Church's Outreach Program is one of 99 food pantries in Manhattan, according to Food Bank NYC. With the most recent 2011 Census Bureau figures showing an increase in the number of people living below poverty level in New York City, from 20.1 percent to 20.9 percent, food pantries like Antioch Outreach are seeing larger crowds gathering for assistance.

Antioch Outreach's organizer, Peggy Allen, says that the program typically serves between 240 and 250 people each Saturday. On this Saturday, however, the Outreach served 296.

"The numbers have increased," said Allen. "It's so busy that it's difficult."

Though food is not served until 8:30 a.m., Allen sees a line already forming when she arrives at the Outreach at 6 a.m.

"I rely on this," said Prado, who has come to the pantry every Saturday for the past six months. Antioch Outreach offers cereal, milk, juice, canned goods, pasta, vegetables and various other products to clients on a weekly basis. Allen explains that food is supplied by the New York City Food Bank as well as through grants. On this particular Saturday, fresh chicken and ham were available—a rarity, Allen said.

"I was so sure we had enough for everybody," said Allen. "But we did run short, maybe 25 people." Clients said they are still pleased with the food. "You want canned foods? Take the chicken tuna," suggests Prado. "It's soft. It's rich. I don't know how they do that." Prado said he has difficulty working due to diabetes and psychiatric ailments. He currently lives with his parents in Harlem.

The food given out at Antioch Outreach feeds more mouths than those seen on a Saturday morning. Due to his diabetes, Prado says he often gives away items he receives that he can't eat. Hassan Stevens, who has been visiting the pantry every weekend for the past two years, said he does the same thing.

"If there is pork, I give it away," said Stevens, a practicing Muslim who is unemployed and looking for work in maintenance.

The Outreach also serves as a social time for community members who stop by. Mike Evans comes to the pantry from time to time on his Saturday mornings, although he doesn't hold a number. "Somebody else needs it better than I do," he said.

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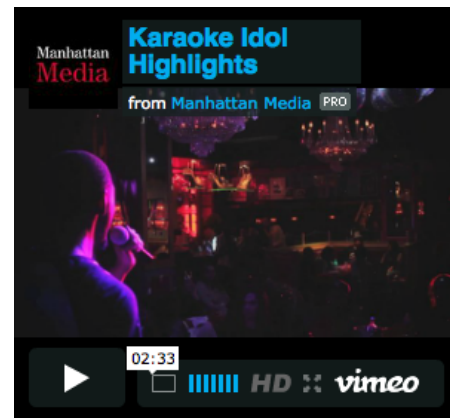
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