

Neighborly News



2026 February Edition



Caring for our neighbors of the Alamo, Cooper, Martin, Otsego and Plainwell communities since 1983.

Our mission is to provide a safe place for people in our community who need food, rent and utility assistance, education, or other resources to help create stability in their lives.



-The Director's Note -

Warm Hearts, Warm Homes

As winter settles into Allegan County, the cold reminds us just how fragile “home” can be. When temperatures drop, heating costs rise, and for many of our neighbors that choice becomes painfully real: heat the house or pay for food, medicine, or rent.

At Christian Neighbors, our hearts are focused on helping people stay safely in their home. Did you know that in Allegan County there is no homeless shelter or transitional housing to fall back on? When someone loses housing here, the options are limited and the consequences are devastating. Through emergency financial assistance, agency collaboration, and compassionate support, we work to ensure that warmth, dignity, and stability are not luxuries, but lifelines.

Your support of Christian Neighbors helps turn warm hearts into warm homes when they are needed most.



Jennifer Collins
Executive Director

Faithful Service, Lasting Impact

After nearly four years of dedicated service, Christian Neighbors will be saying goodbye to our Food Pantry Director, Amy Van Putten.

Amy has been so much more than a staff member - she has been the glue that held our food pantry operations together. From coordinating volunteers and organizing food drives to managing donations and ensuring our shelves stayed stocked, Amy worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make sure neighbors in our community had the food they needed. Her steady leadership, compassion, and heart for service have made a lasting impact on our organization and on the many families she helped keep fed.

Amy has made the heartfelt decision to return to working with children, following where her heart is leading her next. While we will miss her deeply, we celebrate her passion and the difference she will continue to make in the lives of young people.

On behalf of all of us at Christian Neighbors - staff, volunteers, and the neighbors we serve, we extend our deepest thanks to Amy for her hard work, dedication, and the care she poured into this role every single day. Her impact here will not be forgotten.



Amy VanPutten
Food Program Director

We wish her nothing but joy and success in this next chapter.

Heat is Dignity - Heat is Safety - Heat is Hope

Propane heat is not a luxury in our community, it is essential. It warms homes, keeps water running, and allows families to cook meals and sleep safely through the night. Yet this season of extreme cold has driven propane usage far beyond what most households budget for. Tanks are emptying faster, fill-ups are needed more often, and heating costs are climbing at a pace many simply cannot afford. A partial fill is around \$600, and a full fill is around \$1000. This is out of reach for so many of our local families.

We hear similar stories every day, families skipping meals, seniors isolating themselves in a single heated room, parents watching their propane gauges drop and wondering how they will manage another fill. These are hardworking people who have done everything right, but the combination of extreme cold and rising costs has pushed them to the edge.

Christian Neighbors has seen a significant increase in requests for propane assistance this winter. The need is urgent and growing. Each additional fill we can provide means a family staying warm through the night, a child doing homework at the kitchen table instead of shivering under blankets, an elderly neighbor remaining safe in their own home.

As a community, we have always come together in times of hardship. This winter is calling on us again. With additional support, we can ensure that no one must endure the cold alone, and no family must make impossible choices just to stay warm.

Meet Mikki

In January, during the bitter cold snap, we had a single mom with two kids contact us for assistance getting propane. Her tank was just above 20% so we thought we had a little wiggle room to connect with her propane service provider and our partner agencies to get her propane tank replenished. She was going to apply for heating funds through a state grant as well and then get back to us.

Seven days later, she called in a panic because her tank was already at 8% and she was unable to access the application for the state funding because the online application time frame is short and they shut it down as soon as the limit of applications for the week has been reached. Time was running out and she could feel the cold creeping through the walls and under the floor in her poorly insulated trailer. We were expecting below zero temperatures that weekend so we immediately contacted the propane company and put in our commitment to get a partial fill arranged in the hopes they could get out there before she ran out and her small family froze over the weekend. Thankfully we have a wonderful working relationship with some of the local companies that will provide service without the payment up front, just our promise, and they went out the next day to put propane in her tank without the next day service charge. Our neighbors in need are faced with many stressful situations, some situations are more dire than others and in the harsh winter, these can become life or death situations. We are so thankful that we can help with our community's support.



Severe Weather Brings Increased Heating Costs

It has certainly been a challenging winter, with extreme cold and heavy snow. This is just one of the many reasons why our Emergency Financial Assistance program is so critical. It is always our top priority to keep those in need in our local community warm and housed. Once someone becomes homeless, especially if children or elderly are involved, it becomes more expensive and labor intensive to rehouse them. Housing availability in our community is at a record low rate of availability. The wait for a 1-bedroom subsidized apartment is around 1 to 3 years in our area, depending on specific circumstances. The current housing situation is especially dire for our high number of senior citizens who do not own a home. Many of our elderly clients live off of \$1300 a month or less in social security and it is impossible to live on that while paying full rent, car insurance, utility bills and buying groceries. Monthly rent has risen at a pace that wages and income cannot keep up with and when coupled with high energy and food costs, we find people needing more help with rent to stay in their homes. In 2025, we saw a 43% increase in rental assistance. This is a pace that will be difficult for our organization to sustain and our community's help and support is critical for our mission.



Shannon Zabaldo
Financial Case Manager

In 2025, we saw a 43% increase in rental assistance.

Pantry News: Operation SOS A Success

Due to the changes in SNAP benefits back in November, our pantry was overwhelmed with families looking for food support. Our shelves were depleting fast so "Operation Stock Our Shelves" took place on two separate dates. This food drive was extremely successful in keeping our shelves full throughout the holiday season. The community stepped up with vehicles full of donations. North Point Church and First Congregational of Otsego came to help unload cars and put the items on our shelves. Our community truly does care for their neighbor!



More Ways You Can Help Our Neighbors in Need

- **Stuff the Carts!** (formerly Stuff the Bus). This is always a profitable food drive for us! Food donations, along with cash and gift cards are welcome too. **Event Dates: March 20 & 21, 2026.**
- **Meijer Simply Give** is ongoing at the Plainwell Meijer through March 28. The double match day for this campaign is on **Saturday, March 7 & 21.** We rely heavily on these Simply Give dollars for ongoing pantry needs and placing large orders for delivery.
- How to purchase Simply Give cards.....You will find the cards at the end of the checkout lanes, pick one up and scan it for the minimum amount of \$10 and in any increment of \$10 (\$20,\$30, etc...) On **Saturday, March 7 & 21,** Meijer doubles that amount turning \$10 into \$30, \$20 into \$60, etc... We are extremely thankful for our Plainwell Meijer! If you cannot make it to Double Day, you can drop off your check to us, made out to Christian Neighbors and we will take those funds collected to Meijer on that Saturday.

And as always, donations in our bin are always welcome. Thank you so very much for all the continued support.

2026 PEANUT BUTTER DRIVE

JANUARY 24 - FEBRUARY 28



Peanut butter that is donated directly to a drop box will go to a food pantry in your area.

Monetary donations will be used to bulk purchase peanut butter.

Purchased peanut butter will benefit food pantries across Allegan County that serve more than 6,000 residents each month.

DONATE ONLINE



Allegan County
Food
Pantry
Collaborative

Hungry For Christ
Food Ministry

FIND A DROP SITE



Honor and Memorial Tributes (Jan 25 - Jan 26)

In Honor of:

Alex Trefilek
Alice Lappin's 90th Birthday
Alva Justice
Ann James
Ben & Elizabeth Trefilek
Bob & Jeanne Ridderman
Brian & Lynn Calderwood
Catherine Calderwood
Dave & Jackie Dutton
Dale & Sheri Moore
Duane & Priya Campbell
Ellen Deneau
Eric & Lor Campbell
First Congregational Church
PATH Walk Team
Gene & Kathy Meert's 70th
Anniversary
Harleen's 49th Birthday
Holly & Dennis Swinciki
Jane Adams
Janet Benson's Birthday
Janet Ragainis
Jody & Terry Lukins
Kandie Wood
Kathleen Elliott
Kelly Smart
Ken Anson
Linda Campbell
Lynea Hartig
Kim Rayburn - PATH Walk 2025
Malachi Waters 14th Birthday
Marilyn Campbell
Mike & Liz Campbell
Ron & Sandy MacVean
Sharon Carper & Her Teen Cooking Class
Shaun Waters
Spence & Morgan Trefilek
Sue Priller
Terry VanLent's Birthday
The Lord and His Kingdom
Tobi & Kelli Marshall
Tom & Cherie Trefilek
Tyler & Olivia Roepke
William & Jessica Calderwood

In Memory of:

Al Gearig
Alva Burleigh
Andrew Smit
Anne Marie Sylvester
Ava Burleigh
Barb Smalla
Betty Hotchkiss
Betty Mahieu
Betty Tomion
Beulah Pallett
Bill & Merry Wallace
Bill Bibart
Bill Cooper
Bill Kissinger
Bill Standish
Bill Stout, Jr.

Bill Vance
Bob DeYoung
Bob Snyder
Bob Townsend
Bret Sunnerville
Bruce Steele
Candy Statler
Carl Dortch
Craig Pulver
Dale Roth, Jr.
Dan Sturman
Dave Moran
David Hartig
Dennis McConney
Dick & Judy Ramm
Dixon Pulver
Don VerHage
Donna Book
Donna Lampros
Dorothy Gregory
Dorothy Kissinger on Mother's Day
Dot & Gene Watson
Doug Wesler
Dr. Cliff Haff
Ernie Sunnerville
Evelyn Klein
Evie Sell
Frank Nevison
Glenn Gregory
Harold & Mary Beth Garman
Helen Honeysette
Jacob Myers
James Bevins
James Dendel
James Taylor
Janelle Eddy
Jennie Town
Jean Merrill
Jim Cronkhite
JoAnn Eddy
JoAnn VanderBorgh
John & Mildred Doelker
John Flatt
John D. Westbrook
Joline A. Hoffman
Judy Hill
Kathie Johnson
Kathy Kowall
Kathy Plotts-Shimnoski
Ken Cronkhite
Ken Doctor
Kenneth Moran
Kevin Richardson
Kyle Hegedus

Larry Elgersma
Lela Johnson
Mabel Stenesh
Marilyn Fenner
Marilyn Welcher Fenner
Marion Lyon
Mark & Kathy Tuinstra
Mary File
Mary Howe
Maxine McFanin on Mother's Day
Mick McFanin
Mike Cooley
Mike McFanin on his birthday
Mona Erickson
Myrna Jacobson
Oliver Ellis
Pat Dutton
Patricia & Earl Gillette
Paul Cutter
Paul Eddy
Paul Kissel
Paul Ponitz
Paula Sunnerville
Phil Curtis
Peggy Madison
Rebecca Galloway
Regina Johands
Rev. Jim Boehm
Richard Wheatley
Robert Dalton
Robert Kennicott
Robert LaDuke
Robert Scherzer
Ron McFanin
Ron McFanin Jr. on his birthday
Ron Thaxton
Sandi Withee
Sandy Fiebiger
Sandy Pomeroy
Sherry Spencer
Siblings of Sharon Doelker
Skip Finch
Steve Kantz
Swaran Kaur
Sylvia & Dale Dratt
Sylvia Davis
Taylor Glessner
Travis Hunter Pickett
Vance Swope
Virginia Van Dewage
Wanda Scofield
Ward Kissinger
William "Bill" Binning

Thank You WESCO in Plainwell!



Big Shout-out to WESCO in Plainwell, and the many customers who participated in their Round-up campaign. They helped raise over \$6,000 that will go towards helping our neighbors in need.



ERC Work: Warm Hearts, Warm Hands

Warm hearts . . . warm homes. Looking at those words make me wish I were under a cuddly blanket enjoying time with my family, as soup simmers on the stove or vegetables roast in the oven. It makes me think about a sense of safety and belonging and serenity.

That same feeling often fills the Education Resource Center as small groups of participants attend hands-on cooking classes, exercise classes, bingo games, community meals, informational programs and more.

In the next few weeks, teens will learn to make chicken Parmesan, adults will cook a recipe for one during the Link with Lunch classes, Little Chefs will learn to use chopsticks and make banana sushi, and participants will explore ways that slow cookers can help them make nutritious and easy meals.

A sustainable farmer will help people dream about what they can grow in their gardens this summer, a professional organizer will teach strategies to declutter a home, and OMPT staff will help participants assess how to improve their walking strides to stay active.

Trained VITA volunteers will help low-income individuals prepare tax returns and, for many, capture much needed credit refunds. And the Resource Workshop from 10 a.m. to noon each Monday offers people a chance to tackle various tasks on a computer or meet with a case manager to explore ways to face financial challenges.

The common thread between those diverse programs and activities?

People gather to share learning and life experiences. Along the way, they help create a safe “home” away from home for themselves and others.

Check out the events calendar on the Christian Neighbors website to learn about the programs mentioned above and more. Register to attend the programs – which are free to anyone who can get to the ERC – using a link in each calendar entry, dropping a message to scarper@christianneighbors.org or calling (269) 685-4166 ext. 107.



17th Annual Reflection of Hope Dinner & Auctions

Thursday
May 14th, 2026



Soup Suppers

2
0
2
6

Thursday, March 12

Otsego United Methodist Church
223 E Allegan St, Otsego
5-7pm

Wednesday, March 25

First Congregational Church
120 W Morrell St, Otsego
5-7pm

Wednesday, April 8th

Christian Neighbors
282 12th Street, Plainwell
5-7pm

Wednesday, April 22

Hope Lutheran Church
290 12th Street, Plainwell
5-7pm

Wednesday, May 6

Martin United Methodist Church
969 E Allegan Street, Martin
5-7pm

TBD

Friendship Wesleyan Church
1285 102nd Avenue, Plainwell
TBD

Find our Calendar of Events and more by scanning the QR code to the right or visit www.christianneighbors.org/calendar.



Need a notary? Christian Neighbors will have a notary available at the Education Resource Center on Mondays from 10a-12p. If you need to make an appointment for another time, please contact Shannon at 269.685.4166 x 106, or email her at: szabaldo@christianneighbors.org.





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Christian Neighbors SE

282 12th Street

Correspond to:

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Plainwell, MI 49080

PH: (269) 685-4166

www.christianneighbors.org

info@christianneighbors.org

MISSION STATEMENT

Our Mission is to provide a safe place for people in our community who need food, rent and utility assistance, education, or other resources to help create stability in their lives.

*"Together we are Neighbors
Caring for Neighbors"*

Learn more about volunteer opportunities on our website under the "Ways to Help" tab.

Check out our Amazon Wish List by scanning with your camera phone the QR code to the right, for a list of all the current needs at Christian Neighbors.



Simply Give: Meijer in Plainwell

December 28, 2025 - March 28, 2026

Double Match Days: Saturday March 7 and 21!

Turn your \$10 gift into \$30 on Double Match Day.



Gift cards are located at the check-out registers, not express lanes. You may also drop off your donation at Christian Neighbors, please be sure to put Memo: Meijer Simply Give or visit our website at: www.christianneighbors.org, and hit the DONATE button, and reference Meijer Simply Give.

Thank You from Christian Neighbors!