



**For Immediate Release**

## **Common Pantry Celebrates Future New Home**

*The purchase of a North Lincoln Avenue property will help the city's oldest continually-operating food pantry to continue fighting food insecurity and provide new opportunities to engage the community*

**May 10, 2021 - CHICAGO** - The city's longest-running food pantry opened its doors in 1967. Now it's getting something it's never had: a building of its own.

"Owning a building of our own is transformative for Common Pantry, which has been a mainstay, ingrained in the fabric of the Northcenter neighborhood for decades," Executive Director Margaret O'Connor said. "We are deeply grateful to our community for all the support we've received over the years, and to our local and state elected officials for making this incredible step forward a reality for us."

The ability to design a new space in the property just three blocks from their current home will help Common Pantry increase its efficiency and accelerate the nonprofit's strategic plan to better serve people in need. This announcement comes on the heels of one of the most challenging years in the Pantry's history, with the organization serving an average 750 families per month at the height of the COVID crisis, compared to about 300 monthly pre-pandemic.

Finding a way to purchase a building in the neighborhood has been a dream many years in the making, said longtime board member and current President David Brown.

"It was critical to Common Pantry leaders that we stay in the neighborhood we have called home for so long, and we are thrilled this opportunity presented itself," Brown said. "Our community has been so supportive of Common Pantry's mission and we know we can count on them for help as we work to make the new space something everyone can be proud of."

### **Moving a few blocks away**

The new building is three and a half blocks from Common Pantry's longtime home in Epiphany United Church of Christ, at the corner of Damen and Bradley. The new home at 3900-10 N. Lincoln offers a blank slate for Pantry leaders to carry out operations, like

storing and distributing nonperishables, fresh produce and hot meals, and also build capacity to strengthen social service programs for guests.

“After decades of sharing our space with Common Pantry, Epiphany considers them as family, and our missions of service are intertwined,” the Rev. Kevin McLemore, pastor of Epiphany, said. “We are thrilled and look forward to continuing to work with them throughout this new beginning.”

In addition to getting more space, the new location is closer to public transit, is ADA-accessible, and has greater visibility on a major thoroughfare in the community.

Common Pantry purchased the building from the owner of Wasabi Café who has vacated, while C’est Bien Thai will continue operating. Common Pantry will be selecting an architect and working to renovate the space before moving in, O’Conor said.

### **State grants came through for purchase**

Local elected officials including state Sen. Sara Feigenholtz, state Rep. Ann Williams, and 47th Ward Ald. Matt Martin were instrumental in making the transaction happen.

“There’s no reason for anyone in our community to face food insecurity,” state Sen. Feigenholtz said. “We can work together to solve this problem, and I’m glad to have Common Pantry as a partner in this.”

Williams also congratulated Common Pantry. “This is a huge win for our community,” Williams said. “I have enjoyed a long working relationship with Common Pantry and congratulate them on gaining this support from the state.”

IFF, an agency that provides loans, consulting, and development support to mission-driven nonprofits, is offering development assistance and project financing on the purchase.

### **Embedded in the community**

While guests will continue to rely on Common Pantry, the new building will also help O’Conor, her full-time staff of 2, and an 11-person volunteer board of directors made up of local residents provide opportunities to engage with the communities of Northcenter, Lincoln Square, Roscoe Village and Ravenswood.

Despite the pandemic, Common Pantry continued its well-known and successful engagement programs including “Common Kids” to help youth volunteers understand the root causes of poverty and the “I Am Your Neighbor” restaurant meal donations initiatives. In fact, Common Pantry did not cancel a single food distribution day since the start of the pandemic. Strong support from hundreds of volunteers, local businesses,

schools, service organizations and places of worship has ensured continuity for these critical programs decade after decade.

This year, on Oct. 1 Common Pantry will host its 10th “I Am Your Neighbor” Party, the organization’s largest fundraiser and community celebration.

With only three paid staff, Common Pantry relies on volunteers for many of its day-to-day operations, from food distribution to organizing food drives and delivering meals to homebound seniors. One local neighbor even bakes fresh loaves of bread from his own grain for a weekly hot lunch. In 2020, volunteers logged 5,740 hours for the Pantry.

“Margaret and the board of Common Pantry keep coming up with new and creative ways to fight food insecurity,” Alderman Matt Martin said. “I can’t wait to see what they will come up with as they put their new space to use.”

### **Continuing need**

Food banks will be responding to the COVID-19 crisis for months and likely years to come, according to the [Greater Chicago Food Depository 2020 Status Report](#). Food costs are likely to rise in the coming year and food banks overall are projected to see a 50% reduction in USDA food in 2021 without further action, the Depository found.

### **About Common Pantry**

[Common Pantry](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit food pantry, was founded in 1967 to combat hunger and food insecurity in specific northern neighborhoods of Chicago. Visit [www.commonpantry.org](http://www.commonpantry.org) for more information.

**Our mission:** Common Pantry meets the emergency needs of our local community by providing healthy food, kinship and support to help overcome poverty-related challenges.

**Our vision:** Strengthen Common Pantry’s capacity to provide food and services for the overall well-being of our clients. We take a strategic, forward-thinking approach to reduce hunger and address the root causes of poverty, infusing compassion into everything we do.

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