**American Heart Association and Redemption Church in Brooklyn, NY Launch Effort to Address Nutrition Insecurity**

Red Hook is a resilient, diverse, and lively waterfront community in Brooklyn. The neighborhood is home to New York’s second largest public housing complex, the Red Hook Houses of the NYC Housing Authority. More than half of Red Hook residents live in public housing. Forty percent identify as Latino, 30% Black, 21% White, and 5% Asian. Red Hook is also geographically isolated. Many residents live far from the subway system and the neighborhood is cut off from the rest of Brooklyn by the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. This example of environmental racism now causes difficulty in accessing such as healthy and affordable food, quality healthcare, and equitable housing. Community concerns about access to healthcare and affordable food were exacerbated with the closures of Long Island College Hospital in 2013 and Pathmark Supermarket in 2015.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the pitfalls experienced by the Red Hook community. Many residents of Red Hook rely upon the conglomerate of nonprofits and faith-based organizations in the community for resources including food and health screenings. Red Hook Redemption, a church that has served the community for over 30 years, has clearly stepped up and led this charge. The church sought ways to bring in food for the community as people were laid off, not able to work and socially isolated as Red Hook lacks access to transportation. Edwin Pacheco Jr is the lead pastor at Red Hook Redemption and has lived in Red Hook his whole life. He sprang into action by connecting with various organizations such as the MET council, Food Bank of NYC, and City Harvest to help alleviate the food access issues the community was facing.

*“We realized how important it was us to get food for the community, initially we thought it would be a one-shot thing, but even after things opened up during COVID, we still had lines around the block at our Food Pantry.”* – Edwin Pacheco JR

Red Hook has a sense of community that is not found in other neighborhoods. The church was being overwhelmed by the community response to their pantry, so they needed to move into a bigger space. PS 015 provided the space as they saw that many parents who had children in the school were using the pantry. However, the issue became how to best manage the food distribution in an appropriate way. The church was now receiving a lot of food from their partners, but that meant that they had to either give it away as soon as possible or throw out anything that spoiled. Red Hook Redemption was able to purchase one commercial refrigerator for storage, however they realized quickly that it was not enough. Another partner in Red Hook (Red Hook Initiative) connected the Redemption Church with the American Heart Association to help identify solutions. The American Heart Association worked with the church leadership to talk through what resources the food pantry needed to help alleviate the challenges they were facing.

The American Heart Association, with gratitude to support from the JT Tai Foundation, provided funding to Red Hook Redemption for a commercial refrigerator and a commercial freezer. Red Hook Redemption received these items on 1/30/2023. The church has attested that the new units will be used for the purpose of broadening their capacity for fresh, perishable healthy foods. These additional items will help Red Hook Redemption keep food fresh, receive more food deliveries and prioritize distribution of frozen fruit and vegetables.

An additional outcome of this collaboration is that the church has also agreed to adhere to Healthy Pantry Nutritional Standards which will ensure that all food and beverage items procured, donated, and distributed by the pantry will promote a standard of quality nutrition for the community they serve. These standards are based upon the Healthy Eating Research guidelines. The use of this new policy will further ensure that the food items stored in their expanded refrigerator and freezer are aligned with these high nutrition standards.

Additionally, the pantry team has implemented an evidence-based food security screening tool developed by Feeding America. This screening will be administered by church staff based on the answers from the screening, community members will be referred to Red Hook Initiative who will support registration for nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. The church staff implementing this tool and the referral strategy have been fully trained to implement this new approach.

All these collective improvements will serve to benefit the 2000 people a month who visit the church’s pantry. More directly, it will continue to foster Redemption Church’s role as a community food hub while providing neighborhood residents access to fresh and healthy foods at no cost.

*“The people of this community want to eat healthy and want to have access to the same type of produce as the richer parts of NYC; the additional fridge and freezer will allow us to provide food steeped in cultural relevance and dignity. The Heart Association gave us the opportunity to ensure that our pantry did things with community health in mind as we have more space, have pantry standards to follow and collaborate with other community partners. It’s unprecedented.”* – Edwin Pacheco JR

The American Heart Association and Red Hook Redemption will continue to be partners in addressing food insecurity while working towards equitable health outcomes in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

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Edwin Pacheco Jr. Date

Lead Pastor

Red Hook Redemption

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Robin Vitale Date

Vice President, Health

New York City American Heart Association