

Joseph Lordi

Distinguished Alumni 2022

CMHS Class of 1967

Joseph Lordi was born and raised on the south side of Youngstown. He attended St. Dominic's School and Cardinal Mooney High School. After leaving Mooney, he attended Business College and married the love of his life, Linda. They had four beautiful daughters and wonderful grandchildren. He was employed as a store auditor for Allied Supermarkets and had a territory of seven states. This was a challenge to his young family.

A drastic turn took place when Allied went out of business and all the local grocery stores such as Kroger's and Loblaws closed as well. Joe could not find a job and he was getting behind on his bills. Eventually his electricity was shut off and then his water. His marriage was starting to fall apart, when seeking public assistance he found this to be a most humbling experience. He was denied public assistance because he owned an old station wagon that was valued \$200 over book price, and they said because of that fact he did not need help. During that time, the steel mills, the main industry in our area, closed. Thousands were like Joe...no job...no income...no food for the table...bills piling up and the threat of foreclosure on their homes. This was a very tense time for Joe, his wife and children; the strain and anxiety were insurmountable. However, Joe had an idea. He sent out letters to countless businesspeople in the area telling them that he had wanted to start a food bank and distribute food to the poor and needy in the area. He said: "I know what it is like to need food and a helping hand. I am going through it."

Each day he waited for the mail to see if anyone would respond. One day he received a letter... but not the letter he hoped for...it was a foreclosure letter. He was told that he had to be out of his house in ten days. Not only was he fearful about losing his house but he was afraid his wife would leave him. About midnight on the night, he received the foreclosure notice he said he dropped to his knees and cried out to the Lord: "Show me what you want me to do...I can't do it anymore!" For the next few days, Joe begged God for an answer...a direction. He was in the depth of despair.

Two days later a wealthy local entrepreneur sent Joe a registered letter and asked him to come to his office for a meeting. This businessperson was interested in Joe's idea of a food bank and offered him a job at one of his grocery stores. Joe humbly said he did not know if he could do it and when persuaded... he told his story about the prospect of losing his house in three days. The man asked Joe how much he owed on the house, and Joe said \$9870.00. The entrepreneur called the bank that held his mortgage and told the manager that Joe would be down with his personal check to pay the debt. When he left the meeting, once again Joe dropped to his knees, cried prayers of thanksgiving to God, and prayed for guidance for his plan to feed the hungry. He said he found one last quarter...went to an old phone booth..., called his wife, and told her the good news. Joe paused in his story to tell me that before this devastating period in his life he never really had a relationship with God. He felt he was always distant from the Lord and prayer. From that forward, the Lord and Joe walk together. Prayer is an essential part of his day.

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Therefore, Joe moved as God directed...he knew he was to work with those in need, He started a food giveaway out of his 1978 station wagon. Then, a Mennonite pastor, Rev. McDowell, allowed him to use a vacant lot on the corner of Hillman and St Louis to distribute food.

In addition, that happened...in 1979 Joe acquired an old warehouse on Pyatt Street and opened the doors of what is now Gleaners food bank. He moved from feeding 75 people out of his Oldsmobile to feeding upwards of 7,000 families a month. He also delivers food to other centers in the area, which include 110 local church pantries, crisis centers, veterans' centers, area schools, minority organizations and housing complexes for the elderly. He receives no federal or state funds. He has built up an impressive network of donors ranging from local grocery stores to Amish farmers. All the food he gives away is free...never a charge!

Over the years, there were bumps in the road but Joe always knew God was with him. One of the lowest points in his life came when his beloved wife of 47 years passed away unexpectedly in 2014. She was not only his best friend, but she was Joe's advisor...she wrote letters soliciting food and equipment, sought donations for the food bank, and assisted Joe as they held their first Christmas dinner in 1986. In addition to planning the Christmas dinner, she bought toys for the children. This annual Christmas dinner is held at St. Patrick's Church has been a tradition ever since.

Joe Lordi, or as people he serves call Mr. Joe, is a true man of God. Every Tuesday he and his helpers deliver food from people of every lifestyle. All are welcome. Joe says that God keeps sending him blessings and he will continue to share them with those in need. One of Joe's favorite Scripture passages comes from Psalm 31, which reads: "I will be glad and rejoice in Your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. But I trust in you, Lord. I say, "You are my God. The Lord preserves those who are true to Him and shows us the wonders of His love."