

Future Christian Homemakers – Laurie’s Online Letter - October 2009

Dear Friends,

Before the holiday baking season really gets underway, take time to organize your pantry or cupboards. Cleaning them out now will make it easier to find what you need. An organized pantry is a help any time of the year, but especially when you have guests or plan extra cooking and baking.

It used to seem that as soon as I cleaned kitchen cupboards, they quickly got all jumbled up again! I’d buy ingredients for some recipe at the store only to later find I already had them; they just got lost in the dark recesses of the cabinet.

Sound familiar? Finally, I created a simple way to conquer pantry clutter: label the shelves. It’s really so easy that I wonder why I never did it sooner.

You probably know the adage, “A place for everything, and everything in its place.” Good advice, anywhere in the house. The problem is, things too often don’t have a specific place. In the pantry, that means family members put the cereal anywhere they find space, and that could be a different place than yesterday! It means little bottles of things like vanilla get pushed to the back where you may never see them when you need them, and open boxes of things like baking soda get tipped over, creating a mess.

Here’s how I solved that problem: I purchased removable labels at an office supply store. I took everything off the shelves, washed them, and then organized similar items together, putting the things we use the most (such as cereal) within easy reach. Once everything had a place in the pantry, I labeled the shelves.

I’ve had FCH classes with a dozen or more girls working in my kitchen at one time so you can imagine how helpful it was for everyone to know where to find things and where to put them away. It’s also helpful when I look to see if I have the ingredients for a recipe. There’s no fumbling through the shelves; a simple glance in the pantry tells me immediately if I have what I need.

Take a look:

I use a Sharpie pen to write on the labels. If you have young children, you might use a second label with a little drawing or symbol they understand.

Over the years, I have removed the labels and write new ones. Our needs change and maybe we need more space for snacks, or hot cereal, or whatever. It’s easy to peel off an old label and put up a new one. These labels do sometimes leave a little residue behind; you could also use painter’s masking tape and write on that (available at any hardware store). It leaves no residue.



Here's our pantry. I use a separate cupboard to store coffee, tea, herbs and spices closer to the stove.

I painted the shelves with a glossy enamel paint that is easy to wash. Bi-fold doors are usually closed and help keep dust out of the pantry.

Cereal and crackers are at eye level and on a shelf tall enough to accommodate large boxes.

Baking ingredients are all on the center shelf so when I bake, I can quickly take out everything I need for a recipe.

If you have wire rack shelves, you will have to find a way to attach labels that works for your shelves. Cut pieces of index cards and use those as labels. Attach them to the front of the shelf with a strip of masking tape on the back.



Here's a closer look at some of the shelves. Since I use bread flour and all-purpose flour, I labeled one bin so I could tell them apart. I store whole grain flours in the freezer, but usually grind my own in small batches so I store just the wheat berries in zipper bags.

White, brown and powdered sugars are just to the right of the flour, out of view in this photo.

Buy baking powder in small containers and label it with the date when you open it. It needs to be replaced every six months. You can read why in Chapter 3 of the FCH Handbook.



I seal my pasta in zipper bags. I use plastic containers to store different types of rice, but found that took too much space for all the various types of noodles and pasta.

On the floor, I keep a crate for some items that are awkward to store on the shelves. I have dry beans and wheat berries in zipper bags in the crate. My bread machine is stored next to the crate as I usually use it just once a week. Keeping it here when not in use frees up valuable countertop space. Other bulky items are stored on the floor; I did not create labels for these.



Of course, your pantry will be different from ours, and you will set it up to meet the needs of your family. Ours changes from time to time. When I buy more wheat berries, or special grains or flours, I will have to move something to create a place for the new items. I might need to get creative and put the bread maker in a closet, or put the stepstool and cooler in the garage. Make the space work best for you.

It may take a little training to get everyone accustomed to your new organization, but you'll find it really saves time and keeps things orderly when there's a place for everything. And please don't let anyone tell you that you've become "obsessive-compulsive"- orderliness is not a disease or psychological disorder!

Remember, our God is a God of order. You can read a devotional on this topic in the Devotional Archives on our site. To "look well to the ways of your household" and be a good steward of all the Lord gives you, you need to have order in your home. Simple organizational strategies like those above will help you achieve a peaceful, orderly home that is relaxing and nurturing for your family.

Until next time ~

Yours in Him,

Laurie Latour

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