Food and hope served at pantries

by Kathy Copple

For some people in the Naperville area, getting enough food to live on is not as easy as going to the grocery store.

Economic hardships have plagued many area residents, forcing them to look to the welfare rolls as a temporary way of survival. But often those payments are not enough to meet these needs. Various church groups in Naperville have begun food pantries.

One such group is Leaves and Fishes Food Pantry, a cooperative effort of Naperville churches, located at St. Raphael Church on Maulhoff Road. Bunny Harmon, service ministry coordinator for St. Raphael parish, is one of the founders of the service, which was established on a community-wide scale in January. Jerry and Pat Higgins are the coordinators and Carolyn Rose is in charge of scheduling. Before the pantry was opened, St. Raphael's, like most other churches in town, had food on hand for people who came to the door in need. But the opening of the pantry convinced there should be a central location which dispenses food on a regular basis.

Now, twice a week, persons in need of food, toiletries and paper products, can come to St. Raphael's and receive necessary items. The pantry is open on Tuesdays from 1 to 3 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Up to two weeks' worth of food is given free of charge to persons in need. The pantry is serving about 125 persons a month, mostly from the Naperville, Warrenville, Hinsdale and Little Italy areas. Mrs. Harmon predicts that this number will grow.

"I think it will be a steady flow," she stated. "I would say the majority are single parents, single women and students who have two or three kids and who are fairly well-off. It sounds so hopeless sometimes because they can't get out and get a job because they have these little kids. If they do get jobs, the highest pay they could get would be minimum wage." Mrs. Harmon noted that many of these families are going through a crisis when they come for food.

"Most people are in a temporary crisis," she stated. "They have a loss of income and then there are the ramifications of either losing their house or whatever else, and they are trying to use all the money they can for their mortgage payments or their bills."

Volunteers from St. Raphael and St. Margaret Mary churches each take up collections of food, toiletries and toiletry items over a month. Also, cash donations are accepted. Food items are purchased from the Bollethorn Center in Carol Stream, a food distribution outlet for the various food pantries in the area, and government subsidies are also available. Right now the pantry is running low on items and is putting out a plea for such things as non-perishable food, paper products, soap, detergent, and staples such as sugar, flour, oil, salt and catup. Those wanting to make a donation can bring the items to St. Raphael Church, 1215 Maulhoff Rd., between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. weekdays.

Another food pantry in Naperville is sponsored by Calvary Temple, and is coordinated by Howard and Jeannine Johnson of Naperville. This pantry operates much the same way as Leaves and Fishes. It is located in the old church building on Welles avenue west of Main Street and is open on Mondays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The Johnsons of Naperville are very enthusiastic about their work at the pantry.

Bunny Harmon (left) and Carolyn Rose with some of the items available at the Leaves and Fishes food pantry at St. Raphael Church.

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Over 1,000 people helped monthly

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to about 18 families in the surrounding area. Many come
from the Calvary Temple congregation and others are
referrals from other agencies.

The Johnsons will pack up food to last a family for a
week to 10 days. They make sure a special treat is in-
cluded in the bags for these families with small children.
According to Mrs. Johnson, many people will come to
them as a last resort, crying as they accept the food.

One of the biggest problems is thesolete, she
noted. "They hurt so bad, it's difficult to accept a
blessing. It is a precious lesson to learn to be able to re-
cieve.

The Johnsons learned this lesson themselves when they
were forced to turn to a food pantry to feed themselves
and their five children. It was a difficult time for
them but they prevailed.

DIST. 203 MEETING

The District 203 Board of Education will meet in
executive session only on Sept. 16 at 7:30 p.m. at the Administration
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