

Food and hope served at pantries

by Kathy Coyle

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 may not be enough. To meet these needs, various church groups in Naperville have begun food pantries.

One such group is Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry, a cooperative effort of Naperville churches, located at St. Raphael Church on Modaff 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 June. 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 persons who came to the door in need. But the operators of the pantry decided there should be a publicized, central location which dispenses food on a regular basis.

Now, twice a week, persons in need of food, toiletries and paper products, may come to St. Raphael's and receive necessary items. The pantry is open on Tuesdays from 1 to 3 p.m. and

Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon. Up to two weeks worth of groceries at a time are dispensed to persons in need.

So far, the pantry is serving about 100 persons a month, mostly from the Naperville, Warrenville, Bolingbrook and Lisle 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 who have two or three kids and who are fairly unskilled. It sounds so hopeless sometimes, because they can't go out and get a job because they have these little kids. And 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 they are on the verge 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."

Parishioners from St. Raphael and St. Margaret Mary Churches each take up collections of food, paper, detergent and toiletry items once a month. Also, cash donations are accepted. Food items are purchased from the Bethlehem Center in Carol Stream, a food distribution outlet for the vari-

ous 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, detergents, and staples such as sugar, flour, oil, salt and catsup. Those wanting to make a donation can bring the items to St. Raphael's Church, 1215 Modaff rd., between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

Another food pantry in Naperville is sponsored by Calvary Temple and is coordinated by Howard and Jeanne Johnson of Romeoville. This pantry operates much the same way as Loaves and Fishes. It is located in the old church building on Benton avenue west of Main street and is open on Mondays and Thursdays from 9:30 to 11 a.m.

The Johnsons, of Romeoville, are very enthusiastic about their work at the

pantry. Howard Johnson, a shipping clerk, works nights so that he can work days at the food pantry. Since becoming involved with the pantry about eight months ago, the Johnsons indicated that they are more sensitive to people's needs.

The couple is assisted by eight volunteers. During the winter months some 25 families seek assistance from the pantry. That number drops

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Bunny Harmon (left) and Carolyn Rose with some of the items available at the Loaves 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 summertime. Most 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 included in the bags for those 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 the pride," she noted. "They hurt so bad, it's difficult to accept a blessing. It is a precious lesson to learn to be able to receive."

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 it ultimately led to

their participation in Calvary Temple's pantry.

"When we work here we are blessed just as much," Mrs. Johnson remarked. "You really do get back more than you give out."

Persons wanting to donate food or clothing to the pantry may drop their offerings in the back of Calvary Temple on Aurora avenue. Every Wednesday and Sunday the Johnsons pick up the food and bring it to the pantry. Food is also made available through government subsidies.

"It's unbelievable," Howard Johnson stated. "It's like Christmas morning every Monday and Thursday for me."

Some churches take in regular collections of food to be distributed in food pantries in Chicago and Aurora. Community United Methodist Church, Grace United Methodist Church and Wesley United Methodist Church each collects food from their congregations once a month and take it to the Common Pantry in Chicago and to the Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry.

According to The Rev. Duane Mevis, pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church, more than 1,000 persons a month are served by the Common Pantry, which is in the Lincoln Park area of Chicago. The three Methodist churches collect food on the first Sunday each month. Rev. Mevis stated that anyone may donate food items to the churches whether or not they are members.

In addition to the monthly food collections, 20 area churches will sponsor the second annual Walk for Hunger, which will be held Sunday, Oct. 14, two days prior to World Food Day. Rev. Mevis stated that last year, some 250 walked the 10-mile route and collected \$13,000 in pledges. This year there are hopes for 500 participants generating a total of \$20,000. Of this money, 75% goes to alleviate world hunger, especially in Africa where devas-

tating famine is going largely unnoticed by the world, is reported. The remaining 25% of the proceeds is distributed among the needy in the community.

SS. Peter and Paul Church also has food available to anyone who comes to the door on weekdays, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. According to Marian Kripp, parish secretary, the church serves from five to 10 persons a month. Parishioners supply the food during two food drives held each year, one of which is held at Thanksgiving time.

Another food pantry is The Upper Room at Naperville Bible Church, 25W361 Maple ave. Open from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Monday and Thursday, the pantry is run by Sue Divincintio. The church congregation contributes money for the pantry and food is then purchased from Bethlehem Center.

According to Mrs. Divincintio, the pantry has a major food distribution each month for persons with long-term need. The other times the pantry is open is to dispense food for a few meals on an emergency basis. Mrs. Divincintio has a list of names of families that are helped on a long-term basis and she stated that she would be happy to add others to that list if they call the church office.

Although some people may go from pantry to pantry trying to get something for nothing, most who show up have been feeding their families such things as dry cereal, spaghetti and catsup.

Those persons working at the food pantries indicated that they are happy to be able to do something for those people. Johnson added that the food pantry workers are just carrying out God's work.

"He feeds the people, not us. We just bag up the stuff for Him."



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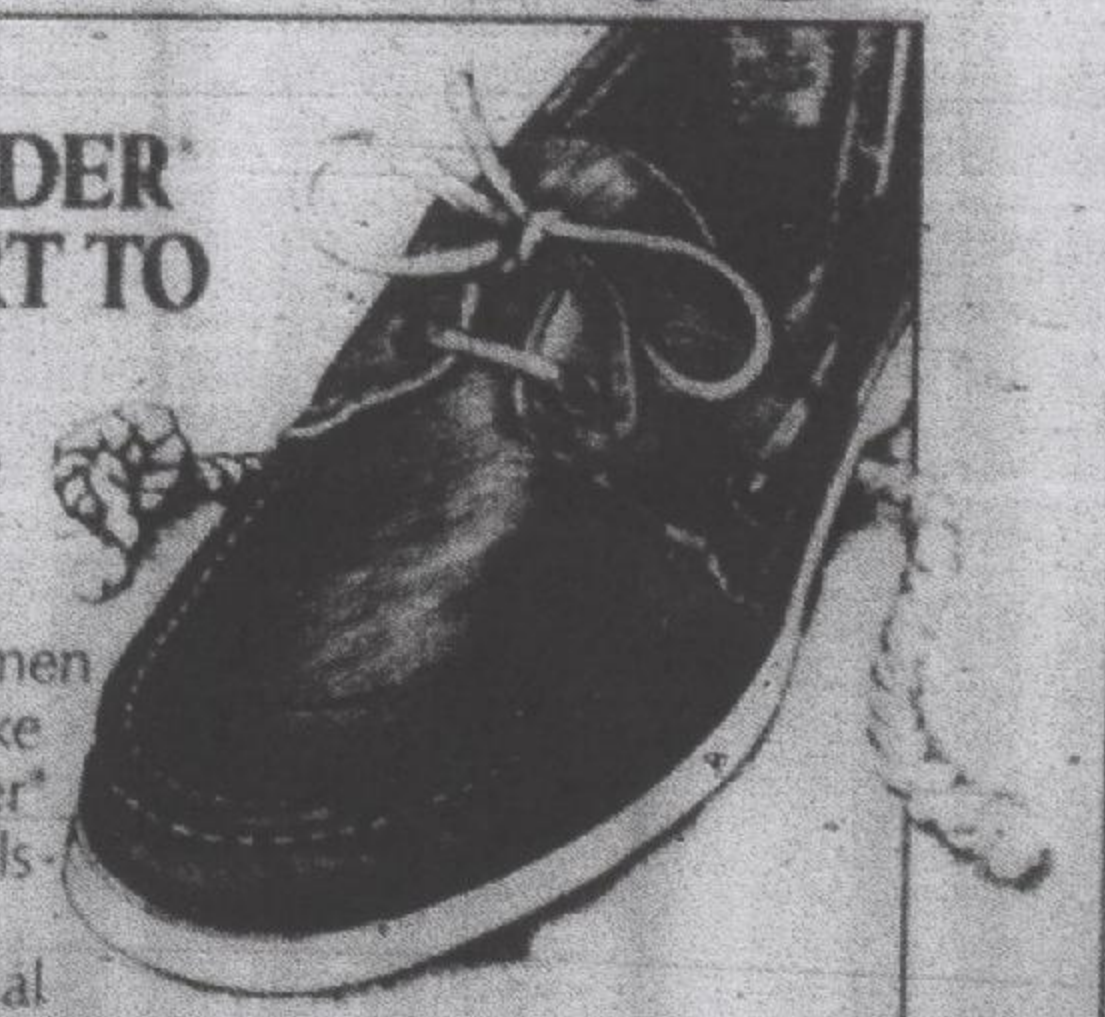
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