

Hunger experts note limits of using charity

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Such emergency providers as food pantries and soup kitchens are being stretched to the limit by the increasing numbers of Monroe County residents seeking donated food, according to one hunger expert.

Tom Ferraro, executive director of FOODLINK, a hunger relief agency formerly known as the Genesee Valley Food Bank, made his comments during a panel discussion of the Monroe County Nutrition Watch Project's 1992 report.

The program took place at the Cornell Cooperative Extension auditorium, 249 Highland Ave, on Friday morning, March 27.

Several Catholic schools, parish programs and outreach centers as well as such agencies as Catholic Family Center were included among the numerous private and government agencies and programs contributing data for the report.

"At this point in time, we've exhausted the potential donated food sources," said Ferraro, whose organization relies on private donations in addition to state and federal funds. He sarcastically commented on President Bush's famous 1988 campaign slogan promoting private charitable acts — "A thousand points of light" — by ad-

ding, "We've extinguished the point of light here."

Statistics in the report illuminated Ferraro's and other speakers' contentions that pantries and soup kitchens are being overwhelmed with people.

Highlights of the report's section on emergency food providers included the following information.

- The number of people served by food pantries more than tripled from 121,858 people in 1987 to 455,387 in 1990-91.

- The number of meals served at soup kitchens more than doubled from 195,000 in 1987 to more than 431,222 in 1990-91.

- Fifty-six percent of food pantries and 20 percent of soup kitchens were forced to turn away some clients during 1989.

- Sixty-seven percent of food pantries and 61 percent of soup kitchens had to stretch food on hand for at least some of their clients during 1989.

The report added that "these percentages have probably risen since 1989, as more people are seeking emergency food assistance." It also noted that in 1987, 36 food pantries and nine soup kitchens were available in Monroe County, whereas by 1991, 53 food pantries were operating along with 23 soup kitchens.

More and more Monroe County residents are experiencing hunger for a variety of reasons, according to the report and the panel speakers:

- Monroe County has a growing poor population, as indicated by substantial increases in the numbers of people applying for food stamps and public assistance.

- Many families use money from food budgets to cover rental costs, which are inadequately covered by public-assistance housing allowances.

- Food stamp benefits fall short of the actual costs of meals.

- Access to stores with affordable food is difficult for Rochester city residents without cars who live in areas with no major supermarkets. Additionally, supermarket chains are often reluctant to move into certain neighborhoods due to security and energy efficiency concerns.

- Supplemental food programs for low-income children, such as the School Breakfast Program, are insufficiently used.

The bottom line for many people who are hungry is economics, Ferraro

'People are hungry because they don't have enough money to purchase food.'

Tom Ferraro



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Tom Ferraro, director of FOODLINK, formerly known as the Genesee Valley Food Bank, answers questions during a panel discussion of the Monroe County Nutrition Watch Project's 1992 report. The panel took place at the Cornell Cooperative Extension auditorium in Rochester March 27.

said.

"People are hungry because they don't have enough money to purchase food," he said.

In an interview following the report's presentation, Ferraro noted that, ironically, the extensive efforts by churches and private organizations to feed the hungry over the past few years may be helping to delay the resolution of the county's growing hunger problem.

Some low-income clients of pantries and kitchens, for example, have developed a regular reliance on the emergency-food providers which enable poor people to use their limited funds for other necessities, Ferraro explained.

Yet, unless those who attend church start questioning the system which produces so many regularly hungry people, "it's like we keep throwing cans at the system."

He added that he would like to see those who volunteer serving the hun-

gry through pantries and kitchens to direct their energies to creating a long-term solution to the hunger problem. Hungry people are often suffering from a number of other problems, he concluded.

"I don't know of one hungry person who just woke up this morning and found themselves hungry with no other problems," he said.

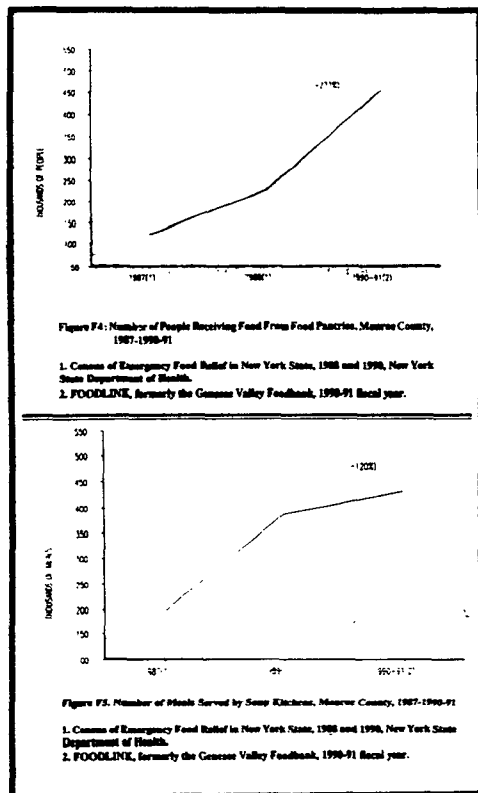
The nutrition report proposed a number of actions to improve access to nutritious food in Monroe County, among them:

- Develop food co-ops in areas of the county where access to grocery stores with affordable prices is limited.

- Increase the minimum wage.

- Write letters to congressional representatives for the Mickey Leland Childhood Hunger Relief Act of 1991, which would remove barriers to receiving food stamps and would increase benefit levels.

- Provide financial assistance to local food cupboards and FOODLINK.



Bishop Thomas Gumbleton to receive Wilson award

ROCHESTER — Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, auxiliary of the Archdiocese of Detroit, has been selected as recipient of the 1991 Joseph C. Wilson Award, presented by the Rochester Association for the United Nations.

RAUN officials will present Bishop Gumbleton with the \$10,000 award during an April 8 dinner at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 125 E. Main St.

RAUN — a local United Nations affiliate, which seeks to promote issues relating to peace — presents the annual Wilson Award to individuals in recognition of international human-rights work.

Previous winners of the award — named after Xerox Corporation's first chairman and one of RAUN's founders — have included ambassadors, physicians and scientists.

"While all of the nominees for the award were outstanding this year, Bishop Gumbleton's leadership in the area of peace and justice are exemplary," RAUN President Bryan Hickman noted of his organization's choice.



Dwight Cendrowski
Bishop Thomas Gumbleton has been selected to receive the 1991 Joseph C. Wilson Award, presented by the Rochester Association for the United Nations.

"His tireless efforts on behalf of the poor and powerless have made a meaningful difference around the world," Hickman said. "He sets an example for all to follow."

While in Rochester, Bishop Gumbleton also is scheduled to meet with area college students from 2:30 to 4 p.m. April 8 in St. John Fisher College's Kearney Auditorium, 3690 East Ave. During the session, he will discuss his peace initiatives and activities.

In addition, Bishop Gumbleton was slated to make an April 9 visit to the Open Door Mission, 156 North Plymouth Ave., at 9:30 a.m. to deliver food collected at the RAUN dinner.

In deciding to present the award to Bishop Gumbleton, RAUN cited his numerous peace and justice efforts.

Bishop Gumbleton was among the organizers of Bread for the World, a religious organization that advocates on behalf of policy changes designed to reduce world hunger. He is also a former president of the organization.

A longtime advocate of human

rights, Bishop Gumbleton traveled to South Vietnam in 1973 to refute claims that the government was not holding political prisoners; to Iran in 1979 to visit the American hostages; and to Baghdad, Iraq, in 1991 to assess damage done by the war in the Persian Gulf.

Bishop Gumbleton also has been active in a number of peace organizations. In 1975, he helped to reorganize the Catholic peace movement in the United States, Pax Christi, USA. The organization promotes disarmament, alternatives to violence, primacy of conscience and a just world order.

In addition, Bishop Gumbleton is a member of such groups as Witness for Peace, Quest for Peace, and the American/Arab Anti-Discrimination League.

The RAUN event is scheduled to begin with a 6 p.m. reception, followed by dinner at 7 p.m. Tickets cost \$40 per person, \$100 per patron. For ticket information, call RAUN at 716/232-1080.

— Lee Strong