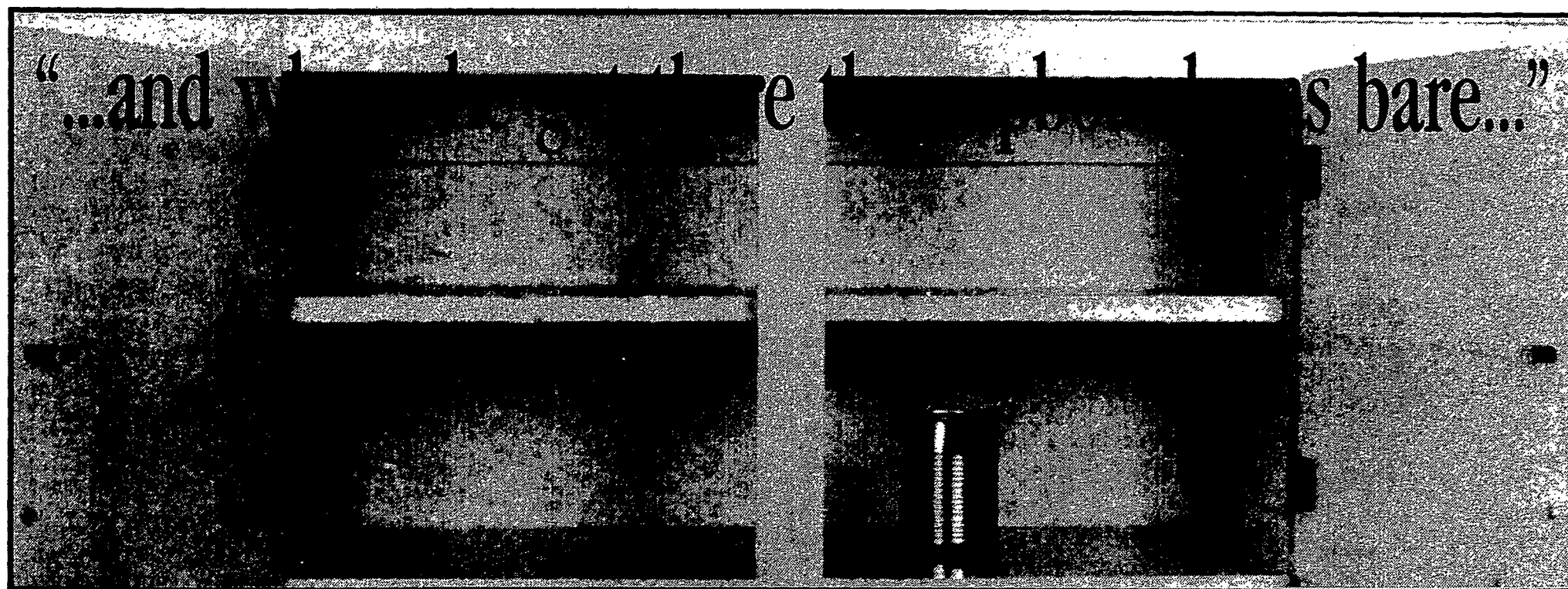




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Food ministries fear funding cuts

As the snowflakes descended upon Rochester's Hudson Avenue one early-November evening, guests stood arm-in-arm singing boisterously inside the House of Mercy. Meanwhile, Sister Grace Miller, RSM, was exchanging joyful hugs with a man and woman just released that day from a drug-rehabilitation program.

"This is the first place they came," noted Sister Miller, House of Mercy director.

The same holds true for many of the inner-city residents who consider the House of Mercy their main place to congregate. In no small part this is due to the availability of meals for northeast Rochester's poor and homeless.

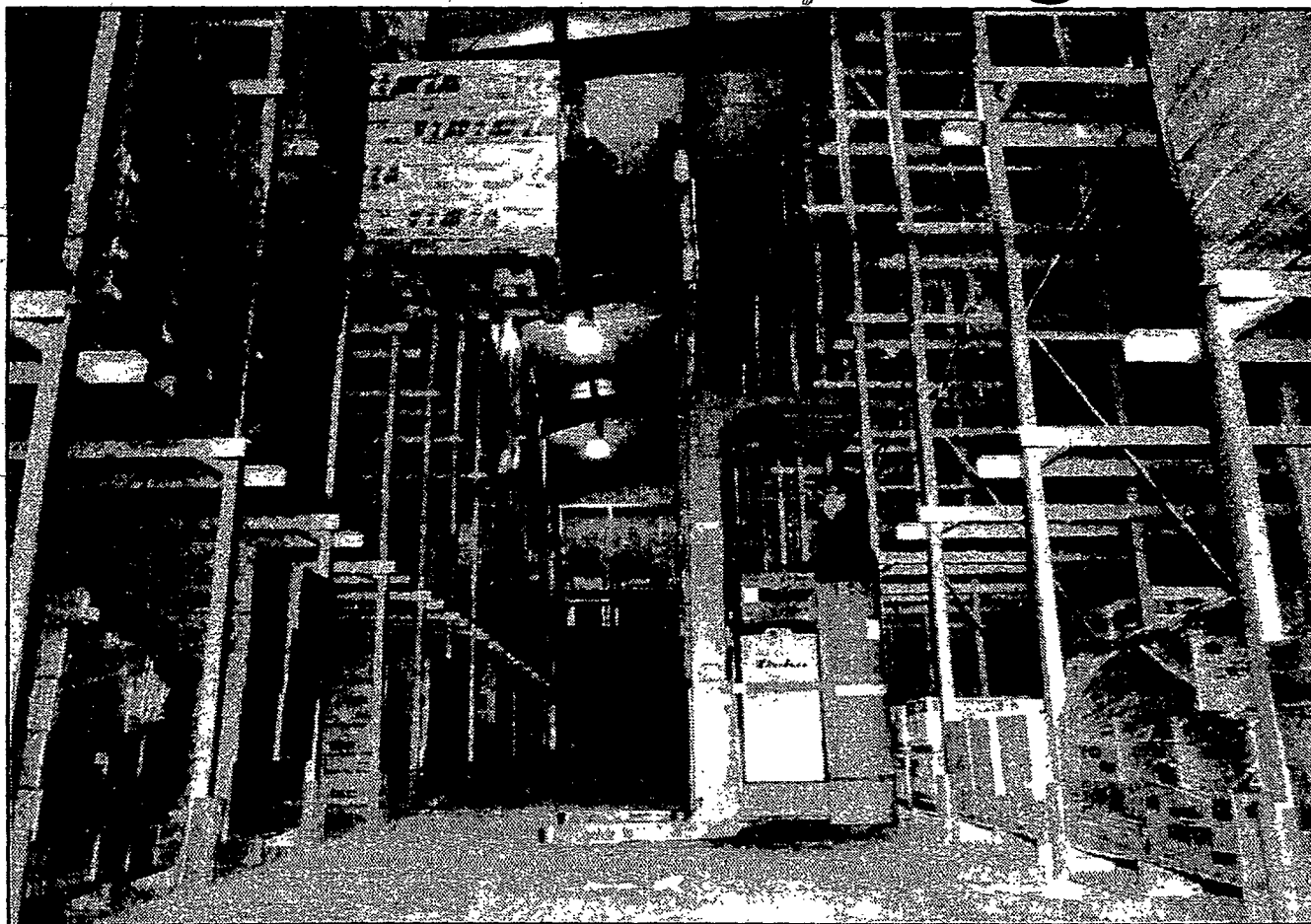
However, if proposed federal welfare cuts take effect as expected by the middle of next year, Sister Miller doesn't know how she'll be able to continue providing the 200 bags of food per day her ministry currently distributes.

"I just dread it. The writing is on the wall," Sister Miller commented.

Budget proposals already approved by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives call for slashes in several food programs, such as the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

These cuts would be certain to extend to ministries such as the House of Mercy, which relies partially on allocations from Foodlink, a Rochester-based food distribution agency.

Thomas Ferraro, who serves as Foodlink's director, noted that 15 to 20 percent of his goods are provided by federal and state government resources. Should that percentage be shrunk through budget cuts, he must then differentiate between "supplementary" ministries and emergency services. Because the House of Mercy provides food in what he considers non-emergency situations, he said that organization would be among the first he would reduce provisions to.



Funding for food outreaches such as Foodlink, along with numerous other welfare-related services, are likely to be cut by several billion dollars. These programs would also be shifted to the state level in the form of "block grants," with each state incurring the responsibility of distributing monies for low-income residents.

However, Ferraro also noted that welfare reform won't significantly affect most of his operation, which distributes 6.5 million pounds of food per year to its 700 outlets in 10 counties covering the northern part of the Rochester diocese and surrounding areas.

Ferraro explained that Foodlink benefits from its proximity to large food companies such as Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., which makes available 25 percent of the food distributed by Foodlink.

On the other hand, Foodlink's counterpart to the south — Food Bank of the Southern Tier — is more dependent on government support in serving its largely rural eight-county area.

John Ferraro, the Southern Tier food bank's director,

John Hand, warehouse supervisor of the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, moves goods with a forklift at the warehouse in Big Flats. The food bank is heavily dependent on governmental support in serving a rural eight-county area.

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