

# Angels Among Us

## Churches plan 25th holiday ecumenical meal

By Kathleen Schwar  
Staff writer

NEWARK — "Let's not make a mountain out of a molehill," Ron Bradley pleaded, preferring to keep his Christmas Day plans out of the limelight.

"We feed people who are hungry, clean up, and close down and go home to our families."

Bradley, a Catholic, is one of up to 50 volunteers from various churches who will put on the 25th Community Shared Christmas Dinner. It is expected to bring together some 150 area residents.

The dinner is held at the First United Methodist Church. Many of the attendees would otherwise be alone for the holiday — single, widowed, unable to gather with far-off friends and family, or developmentally disabled living independently. In addition, Arcadia Hose Co./Newark Fire Department volunteers deliver dozens of dinners, boxed by volunteers, to homebound people.

The dinner draws 20-50 volunteers from as far as Rochester and Seneca Falls. Women of Hannick Hall, a Catholic Family Center women and children's residence for drug treatment, lead singing. Grocery stores donate the 100 pounds of turkey. A florist donates some 150 poinsettias. Thirteen area churches each contribute six pies and assorted gifts.

"It's a nice dinner," Paul Murphy said. The St. Michael's parishioner has been in charge of transportation most years, organizing cars to go out into Newark and the town of Arcadia to pick up some people.

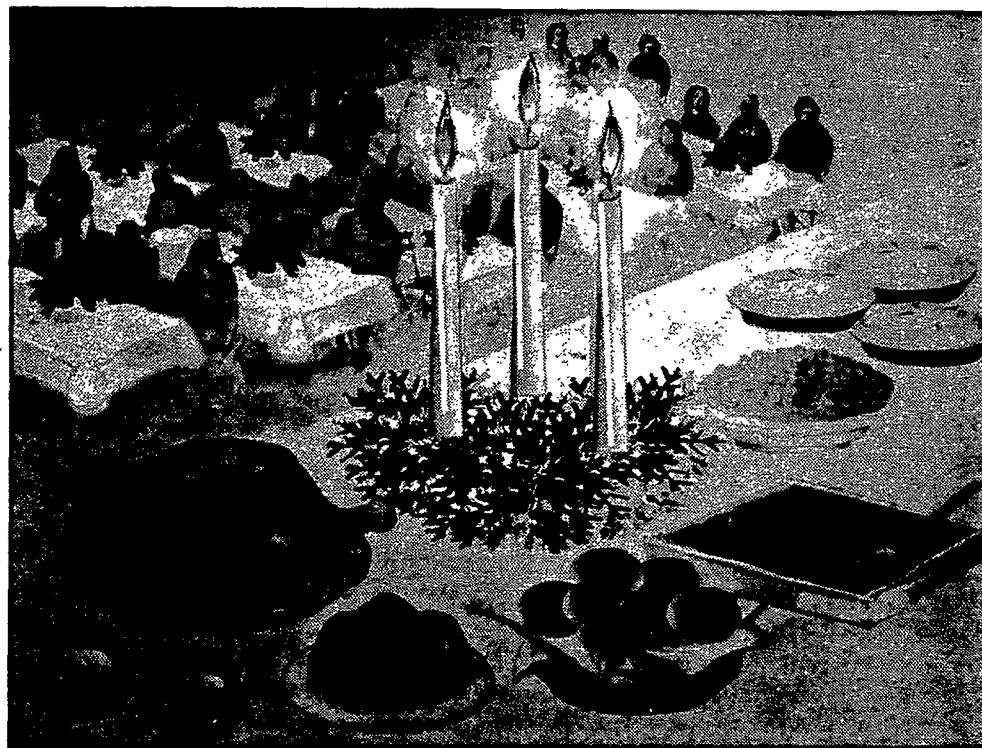
"Our reward is we 'look over' the pies," he joked.

"Regina's got this so well organized that your husband who's never been in the kitchen could come in and run this kitchen," he added.

Regina Krolak, also of St. Michael's, dreamed up the idea for the dinner because she didn't want anyone to be alone, especially developmentally disabled people, with whom she has worked.

"Christmas is probably for a lot of people the saddest day of the year," she said. "For people who have just lost their spouse or moved into town, it's got to be the hardest time of year for them."

"It's always been my biggest wish that people be sensitive to the needs of others, so they wouldn't have to be alone," she said. The dinner has nothing to do



Linda Jeanne Rivers

with lack of means, she said, although it is free of charge, thanks to various donations.

"A lot of people who have to eat alone come down and have their dinner," said Hazel Barclay, 86, who volunteered for years but took advantage herself of the meal last year.

"I sat with ladies from the church, ladies I'd worked at the hospital with," she said. "There was a whole table of loners who came in for dinner. A lot of people don't have husbands, and when you're up to my age a lot don't have friends either."

"It was very good, very homey," she said.

Everyone goes home with a poinsettia, a gift and a small bag filled with an orange, an apple and a candy cane.

St. Michael's parishioner Alice Cravotta also volunteers and eats at the dinner. In fact, when her daughter Angela Koester invited her for Christmas at her Lyons home last year, Cravotta said she'd rather not miss the shared dinner. So her daughter came, too, and greeted people, helping them take off their coats and find a seat.

"She liked it so much, she's doing it again," Cravotta said. "It's a nice community affair."

As for the setting, she said, "It's decorated, more like in a restaurant. There are tablecloths and plants on the tables, real dishes and silver, no paper plates."

And while pies are the rage, she said, "Somebody is thoughtful enough to make angel food cake for those who can't have anything too sweet."

The big shopping day for the meal is the Saturday before the dinner. Krolak and Bradley, chief cook this year, use a shopping list that's evolved through 24 dinners.

"All I can think of is, 'Three French hens, two turtle doves, and 10 bushels of potatoes,'" Krolak sang with a laugh. Besides the potatoes, actually dehydrated, they need 10 cans of cranberry jelly, 16 dozen rolls, six gallon-cans of vegetables,

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— Regina Krolak



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