

CONTINUED...

Helping

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much nowadays."

Meanwhile, Frank Lembo volunteers on Christmas and Thanksgiving at St. Ann's Community. Although many residents are transported off-site for dinners with family members, others do not have that option. So Lembo, a longtime volunteer at St. Ann's, makes a point of coming on the holidays so he can wheel residents to Mass in the St. Ann's Home chapel.

"There are those individuals who don't have anyone. And that hurts," Lembo said, his eyes welling with tears. "That's what is really the sad part."

No day off in ministry

Lembo, a parishioner at Irondequoit's St. Cecilia's Church, is nonchalant about his holiday volunteerism, saying he doesn't consider it a sacrifice.

"You see, I get something out of this too," he emphasized, adding that the residents "just beam when they see you. That's the satisfaction."

Sister Kuhn, also, desires to be with her St. Peter's Kitchen community on Christmas and Thanksgiving: "I see this as my ministry, not my job," she said.

And Bishop Clark feels that he's in the right place by celebrating Christmas Mass at the Monroe County Jail.

"It's a privilege to see men and women in a very tough period of their lives open themselves to the Lord's presence," he said. "And also to have the community saying, 'We love them and support them.'"

Father John Carriero, SJ, regularly joins Bishop Clark and other volunteers to help celebrate the Christmas Mass at the jail. In ministry, Father Carriero stated, holidays can't really be viewed as days off.

"As a Jesuit, our whole life is as a volunteer," remarked Father Carriero, who celebrates numerous Sunday Masses at the jail

during the year.

And he has no qualms about ministering to criminals on Christmas Day, he said.

"I'm not judgmental of them," Father Carriero stated. "Would Christ think that way? When you look at the Gospel, Jesus spent a lot of time with people outside of the law."

Whereas the bishop and Father Carriero have a fairly well-established Christmas routine, Sister Lisette O'Brien, RSM, has learned to expect the unexpected.

Sister O'Brien serves as director of Tioga County Ministry. Last Christmas Eve, as she and the ministry's vice-president, Sister Phyllis McGuire, RSM, were preparing to deliver gifts to three families, a woman called at the last minute requesting presents for her children.

So Sisters O'Brien and McGuire took off quickly from the ministry's offices at St. Patrick's Church in Owego, in search of an open store. They finally happened upon an Ames store in Sayre, Pa., and got the goods.

"We sat in the parking lot and wrapped all the presents. It was snowing lightly," Sister O'Brien said. "Then we delivered them in the early evening. They were so happy."

"We felt like Santa Claus," she added with a laugh.

The next morning, Sisters O'Brien and McGuire attended 9 a.m. Christmas Mass at St. Francis Church in Catatunk, and planned to meet another gift recipient near the church.

But when they learned the person's car had broken down, they traveled a few extra miles so they could deliver the gifts right to the house.

And on Christmas Day 1998, Sister O'Brien recalled, the police became aware of a family in Owego that was going without Christmas dinner but had not notified Tioga County Rural Ministry. The police contacted Dick Franz, a St. Patrick's parishioner and board member of the ministry.

"He went around on Christmas Day to the drugstore and a grocery store. He got

a turkey and presents, and he and his wife, Pat, delivered dinner to the family. They gave them a nice Christmas," she observed.

Juggling plans

This level of effort often means that volunteers must rearrange or miss some portion of their family holiday gatherings.

"Many times it's reorganizing family schedules, saying, 'We'll have to open the presents later,'" said Barbara Joyce, volunteer coordinator for St. Ann's Community.

Joyce noted that Lembo, along with Mark Hanna and Toni Polito, are loyal volunteers at Christmas and Thanksgiving.

"They're here on a regular basis, but always offer to do the holidays," Joyce said.

But Lembo said he doesn't mind helping at morning Mass, saying, "We don't have dinner until 2 in the afternoon. Why not give my time in the morning?"

Forker said his volunteerism with the Elmira Community Kitchen is a part of his 10-month commitment as an Ignatian Lay Volunteer. He works every day the kitchen is open, and that includes major holidays.

As a result, Forker expects to run late for a family gathering on Christmas Day. On Thanksgiving, he said, he only showed up in time for dessert.

"I had a nephew that was a little put out," he said. "But I told people I had already made this commitment."

Sister Kuhn said volunteers at St. Peter's Kitchen also must make alternate Christmas plans to accommodate their 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. work schedule.

"Maybe a family member has to be home to watch the oven while they're here," Sister Kuhn said. "That's the kind of person who works here. They gear their ministry here first, and gear their personal plans around that."

Sister Kuhn, also, juggles family and ministry.

"Later in the day I will pick up my family connection," she said. "It's the best of both worlds."

Temple helps on Christmas

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Most of the year, Catholic ministries turn quite naturally to Catholics for volunteer support.

But what happens when the outreach operation is on Christmas Day, when regular volunteers are less available due to church obligations and family gatherings?

Well, no such problem exists at St. Peter's Kitchen in Rochester. This Dec. 25, approximately 20 Jewish volunteers from Temple Sinai in Brighton will be on hand to help serve a special Christmas dinner. That group will combine with about 15 regular volunteers from St. Peter's Kitchen, according to Sister Barbara Kuhn, SSJ, the kitchen's director. The tradition has gone on for many years, she added.

The Christmas dinner is a stylish affair. Patrons are treated to a sit-down meal, with musical entertainment provided by Temple Sinai volunteers. This year will be extra special because the temple has donated a used piano, in good condition, to replace an antiquated one that had been in the kitchen's dining area.

Elaine Cohen, chairperson of Temple Sinai's social action committee, said her group's goal is "to help out our Christian brothers."

"That's their holiday, and it's easier for us to work," Cohen said.

None of the Temple Sinai volunteers regard their Christmas Day duty as a burden, Cohen said. In fact, quite the opposite occurs.

"It's been a hit. People call in September and say, 'Are we going again this year?'" Cohen remarked.

This year, Cohen noted, Temple Sinai will also send 10 volunteers to St. Joseph's House of Hospitality on Christmas. Even though they don't observe the religious aspects of Christmas, Cohen said, her volunteers enjoy celebrating the spirit of the season in an ecumenical setting.

"In some ways, we feel that part of the day is about giving -- the brotherhood and that kind of thing," she said. "It's a nice way of bringing different people together. It's just such a wonderful feeling of community."

Thoughts to Consider



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