

'Meal deal' for seniors

Peggy Weber/CNS

SPRINGFIELD, Mass — Deacon Frank Ryan and his wife, Kathleen, have combined their love of food, people and service to help organize a monthly parish meal program for senior citizens.

The Ryans began the "meal deal" shortly after his ordination and assignment to St. Anthony of Padua Parish in North Adams in 2001.

Wary of "the lure of too much liturgy and not enough service," and impressed with the parish's kitchen, Deacon Ryan told the Springfield diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Observer*, that the pastor, Father Daniel O'Heir, supported the idea of preparing meals for the needy.

The Ryans became certified in food management and preparation.

They met with local Meals on Wheels sponsors, learning that more than 1,000 senior shut-ins receive meals every weekday through the organization, about 242 meals being delivered to North Adams.

"I found out that many seniors saved part of Friday's meal for Saturday or Sunday or just resorted to a frozen dinner to hold them over," said Deacon Ryan.

Armed with some recipes off the Internet, the Ryans served their first 100 meals on Easter Sunday, funded in part by a parish Lenten collection. Parish children prepared Easter baskets. They served ham, raisin gravy, mixed vegetables,



Gillian Jones/CNS

Deacon Frank Ryan hands David Beighley a cooler as he prepares to deliver meals from the St. Anthony Kitchen in North Adams, Mass. The meal program run by parishioners provides weekend meals to more than 100 seniors.

mashed potatoes and dessert.

Volunteer response was overwhelming, Deacon Ryan said. They had plenty of people to help prepare, package and deliver the food. And using volunteers, the cost is less than \$2, instead of \$6 associated with similar meal programs.

The Ryans' group then decided to make meals "on the three-day week-

ends and provide two meals, one for Sunday and one for the Monday," Deacon Ryan reported. "So now we are making 200 meals a month."

Kathleen Ryan said, "You hear that kids don't care about anyone but themselves but then you see the faces of the youngsters who help deliver meals and know that isn't true."

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