

Area sees increased need for food

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

As the holiday season approaches, some parents will flock to retailers in search of high-tech toys for their children, while others will flock to food pantries seeking a way to feed their families. According to separate studies by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Catholic Charities USA, food banks, pantries and soup kitchens nationwide report a growing demand for food coinciding with an increasing shortage of supplies.

Based on a 2002 Census Bureau survey of 50,000 households, the USDA estimated that 12.1 million households did not have access at all times to enough food in order for all household members to live active, healthy lives. This statistic represents a 0.4 percent increase over data from 2001. The 2002 USDA report also found that on a typical day, hunger among children occurred in 30,000 to 38,000 households. The report found that more than half of food-insecure households surveyed had in the previous month participated in a food-assistance program, received emergency food from a food pantry or eaten at an emergency kitchen.

Meanwhile, Catholic Charities USA recently conducted a survey of 71 agencies across the nation, many of which operate food pantries and cupboards, and found that 66 percent reported an increased need for



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Two-year-old Shakerra Walker (left) and her 3-year-old brother, Sheard, dig into their meals Nov. 24 at Rochester's St. Peter and Paul soup kitchen. Volunteers say they've seen an increase of people served over the last year.

food in 2003.

Due to budget cuts and a lack of government funding, many human-services providers are struggling to meet this growing demand for food, since those same factors, as well as an economic downturn, are causing more people to need food and assistance.

FOODLINK, a regional food bank serving 10 counties in the Genesee Valley and Finger Lakes regions, annually obtains and redistributes more than 6 million pounds of food to at least 550 human-services

providers, including food pantries and soup kitchens. The demand for food from FOODLINK's member agencies increased 9 percent during July 2002 through June 2003, according to Jaime Wemett Saunders, vice president of operations.

"When the economy has its ebbs and flows, you can see that also in our meal pattern," she said.

FOODLINK receives a portion of its food supply from America's Second Harvest, the largest domestic hunger-relief organization in the United States. The organization so-

licits and distributes food and grocery products through a nationwide network of food banks and food-rescue programs, including Food Bank of the Southern Tier, which is operated by Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier. The food bank serves more than 180 member agencies across six counties.

"Over the past two years we've seen a 15- to 20-percent increase in the demand at our agencies," said Frank Carey, director of development for Food Bank of the Southern Tier. "Down in this neck of the woods there were some pretty significant layoffs and cutbacks, starting about two years ago. What's happening in the Southern Tier and upstate New York is pretty consistent with what's happening nationally."

Sister of St. Joseph Barbara Kuhn, co-director of St. Peter's Soup Kitchen in Rochester, said the kitchen, which is open every weekday, serves 39,000 meals each year. She said volunteers at the kitchen see more people coming for meals as the holidays approach, and she has noticed an overall increase in the past year. She believes recent layoffs and cutbacks have put more people under financial stress and caused more people to be homeless or hungry.

"The cuts that we have seen in the budgets do have an impact on us," Sister Kuhn added.

Catholic Courier survey offers prizes to readers

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

As it prepares for major product enhancements and additions scheduled for April 2004, the *Catholic Courier* is about to launch a reader survey, according to Karen M. Franz, general manager/editor.

The survey can be completed online at www.pulseresearch.com/catholiccourier and also will be available as a four-page pullout section in the Dec. 4 print edition, Franz said. Readers will be asked to answer more than 80 questions covering such areas as their overall satisfaction with the paper; the stores at which they shop; and what types of consumer items they plan to purchase.

Franz acknowledged that the survey's primary purpose is to provide tools to be used in the advertising staff's efforts to solicit greater advertising support for next year's new and expanded publications, not to develop a detailed analysis of readers' content preferences. The

paper plans to conduct an in-depth reader survey about editorial content in the fall of 2004, she said.

Information from the current survey will help the advertising staff appeal to prospective advertisers.

"We'll be able to tell our advertisers which age groups are intending to spend quantifiable dollars on various products and services," said Daniel Zollo, the *Courier's* advertising director.

The survey results will be tabulated by Pulse Research, a nationally respected, independent newspaper research firm in Portland, Ore. Readers who fill out the survey may remain anonymous, Franz said.

Readers who fill out the printed pullout survey need only give their ZIP codes. Those who respond to the online survey, in addition to giving their ZIP code, will be asked to give their e-mail address if they wish to enter a random drawing for prizes.

The *Courier* will not contact re-

spondents by e-mail at any time — or otherwise use their addresses — except to notify those who have won prizes in the drawing.

Zollo said Pulse Research will conduct the random prize drawings, and that winners will receive such prizes as restaurant dinners and theater tickets. Among the prizes to be awarded are gift certificates for GeVa Theatre, Nazareth Arts Center, the Crescent Beach Restaurant and Notre Dame Retreat Center.

Franz added that the survey has been commissioned in preparation for the *Courier's* new format being launched in April 2004. At that time, the existing *Catholic Courier* will be transformed into a monthly publication of approximately 40 pages, which will be mailed to all Catholic households in the Diocese of Rochester.

In addition, the *Courier* will begin publishing regionalized weekly newsletters that will be inserted into bulletins at all diocesan parishes.

Initially, Franz said, the newsletters will be produced in three versions — one for Monroe and Livingston counties; one for the Finger Lakes region; and one for the Southern Tier region.

In addition to the *Courier's* printed products, the paper also will expand its Web site at www.Catholic-Courier.com and provide daily online news updates. By filling out the survey, readers will play an important role in the success of these new ventures, Franz said.

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