



MEETING EMERGENCY NEEDS WITH DIGNITY

An Interfaith Emergency Food Network

Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2011

*"We are the light of God's kindness to the poor... Give them not only your care, but also your heart."
—Mother Teresa*

MEND Mission

An interfaith organization meeting the emergency needs of the disadvantaged of Essex County, working to support and facilitate their growth as self-sufficient individuals; assisting them in obtaining benefits to which they are entitled; and advocating for policies that will improve the quality of their lives.

HELP A FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS 2010

The cold winter months are a little warmer and brighter for 244 families in our area, thanks to the HELP A FAMILY at CHRISTMAS Project, which celebrated its 25th anniversary this past December. The program, which matches donors with families in need, is co-sponsored by Catholic Charities Emergency Food & Nutrition Network (EFNN) and Meeting Emergency Needs with Dignity (MEND) and is designed to help families who wouldn't be able to celebrate Christmas without outside support.

Sharon Reilly-Tobin, director of EFNN and MEND, said, "This year I was very concerned we would not have enough donors because of the current economic crisis. Everyone is feeling the effects of the down economy in some way. However, we were blessed this year with enough donors, including a number of first-time donors. It was a beautiful blessing of kindness and concern for these families."

In 2010, Sharon reports that 1060 individuals (78% of whom were children) received toys, presents and grocery gift cards through the Help A Family at Christmas Project. The families that participate in the program are carefully screened by the MEND pantry coordinators. They include critically-needy families who are dealing with unemployment, foreclosure, domestic violence, medical emergencies, incarceration or immigration issues. These families are most appreciative of the support provided by the Help A Family program, as evidenced by the letters shared on page 2 in *A Message From Our Clients*.

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MEND 30TH ANNIVERSARY PRAYER SERVICE

By Kathleen Tobin

On October 26, 2010, MEND celebrated its 30th anniversary and renewed its commitment to Meeting Emergency Needs with Dignity in a prayer service and brunch at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, East Orange.

The prayer service began with a welcome from Pastor Rodwell Thom. A Flame of Remembrance was lit to honor those who began the work of MEND and helped realize its vision.

Also remembered were those who have contributed to the work of MEND and who have been welcomed home by God. A Flame of Gratitude was lit to offer thanks for all the dedicated volunteers and the generous donors who have contributed to MEND's service to, and advocacy of, the needs of the hungry in our midst. Finally, a Flame of Mission was lit, with the hope that the same energy and commitment that has sustained the program for the past 30 years will



Edwina Hale lighting Flame of Remembrance

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continue to alleviate the hunger of our brothers and sisters.

Pastor Thom reflected on MEND's many accomplishments and on the contributions it continues to make to the community.



Flowers were presented to Catherine L'Insalata, Catholic Charities' Division Director of Community and Volunteer Services, and to Sharon-Reilly Tobin, MEND Coordinator by the MEND network. Catherine offered a reflection on the importance of MEND's work and shared some of Sharon's memories about the extraordinary people who have been part of MEND through the years.

MEND received a Proclamation from Joseph DiVincenzo, Jr., Essex County Executive, in which he recognized MEND's "commitment to responding to the ever-changing needs of their particular communities by providing support services in addition to their food and pantry operation".



Stephanie Gidigbi, Chief of Staff for the City of Orange, shared a Proclamation from Orange Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, recognizing the great work and efforts of MEND.

The congregation joined in the Prayer of Recommitment to Fight Hunger in Our World together, recommitting itself to pray for those in need, provide food for the hungry, and to continue to work



together to create a just society. The service ended with a benediction to go into the world in peace.

Robert Williams, Music Director of Blessed Sacrament Church, led the congregation in "This Little Light of Mine" at its conclusion.

Alison Bryant, Church Women United, arranged for a wonderful brunch, during which guests and pantry representatives could view a photo display of the impressive work of MEND pantries in helping serve the needy.

A Message From Our Clients ...

"...Dear Friends,

As the teacher of a family you helped, I would like to let you know how much your generous gifts mean to the child in my class and her baby sister and mother. Their financial situation had worsened in the months before the holiday season; the mother was feeling very sad and hopeless realizing there would be next to nothing for her children at Christmas time. Your kindness, in the way of such wonderful gifts, was incredible. Everyone was so happy on Christmas morning. I wish you happiness in the new year. "

"Dear Christmas Angel:

I am writing this letter to express my gratitude. My children and I had the most wonderful Christmas this year because of you. It has been years since my children eyes light up the way that they did this Christmas. We thank you so very much for all that you have given us, not just for gifts but for saving our faith. There were times when we felt no one cared and along came you, 'Our Christmas Angel'. Thank you for everything and may God shower your life with blessings forever. God Bless You. Again, thank you for saving our Christmas."

Dear Donor,

"My name is Grace and I want to thank so much on behalf of my family for making Christmas a time when my husband and I could not. My children were so surprised and excited about heir gifts that my youngest child was in shock...I know that you did not have to do what you did, but thank you for everything. One day when we are able, I want me and my family to give back to a family. Thank you once again, and we pray that God continues to Bless you and your family for helping me and my family".

Dear Donor,

We thank you for all you've done
You've made our holidays

Such great fun.

With love you seemed to supply our needs,
Pocketbooks, dolls, clothing, gift cards

Sugar and recipes.

We felt special and we know you are,
You filled our hearts with the best thus far.

We wish there were words to truly
Profess our thanks,

But we know God has some blessings
And He'll fill your tanks (hearts)

Bethel Church of Love & Praise F.P. and Glen Ridge Congregational Church *Partners in Service to Those in Need*

Bethel Church of Love and Praise, in Bloomfield, is a welcome source of relief in its community, providing food and comfort to the working poor and others since 2002. Bethel opened its food pantry and meal center almost nine years ago, with the expectation that it would be in operation for only a short period to help alleviate the effects of what was seen as a temporary local economic downturn. However, the need for these services has continued and even grown as our economy has lagged.

A leading force in the creation and continuing operation of the Bethel food pantry and kitchen is LeWanda A. Pleasant, an assistant minister at Bethel. LeWanda recalls that Bloomfield, although a working class community, was more suburban than urban, not saddled with many of the problems of heavily urban areas. It had no large pockets of unemployment and homelessness. However, once the doors were open, the number of pantry clients began to grow and has remained high. LeWanda estimates that the number of pantry clients has tripled since 2002, and is now approaching about 1,200 per month. In addition, Bethel's meal center provides about 180 meals per week to the hungry.

Bethel sees a growing requirement for increased resources to serve those in need. At some future time, it would like to obtain funding for a dedicated facility, equipment, and permanent staff. In the meantime, LeWanda, like all MEND affiliate pantry managers, is making do with the assets she has. Outstanding among these assets are a dedicated group of church volunteers, some of whom are pictured below, and a continuing and



much appreciated partnership with Glen Ridge Congregational Church.

In 2003, Reverend Cynthia Reynolds arrived at Glen Ridge Congregational as Associate Minister and assumed responsibility for its Mission Outreach Group. She became aware of MEND's Help-a-Family program and

encouraged participation by her congregation. In 2007, wanting to do more, Cindy approached Sharon Reilly-Tobin at MEND and asked whether she was aware of any soup kitchens that might need help. Sharon, in turn, directed Cindy to LeWanda at Bethel.

As a result of their meeting, LeWanda and Cindy agreed that Cindy would bring volunteers from Glen Ridge to assist with the preparation and distribution of food on the first and third Thursday of each month. The volunteers cover a wide age group but are primarily in the junior to senior high ages. These young people have embraced the program enthusiastically, and there is no shortage of volunteers. Cindy finds herself having to rotate among volunteers to ensure that all have the opportunity to serve. LeWanda says, "They are warm, nice, very helpful, and not afraid to get their hands dirty." In addition to the student volunteers, two adult volunteers from Glen Ridge also regularly assist in the operation of the meal kitchen. They are Emily Grover-Kopec and Marsha Watson, pictured at the right of the above picture. Glen Ridge Congregational Church also continues to participate in the Help-a-Family program, collects food for the pantry in a shopping cart provided by Shop-Rite at the church, and participates in Thanksgiving food distributions. Even the church brownie troop has donated food. Recently, Megan Downey, a brownie and second-grader, came to Bethel and subsequently wrote: *I thought it was a great experience for me because me and my brownie troop donate food there. We stayed there for 2 hours. But I wanted to stay longer! ... My best part is to meet new people and helping them.* To quote from a popular TV show, "This is what it is all about!"

As my visit came to an end, LeWanda stated that she greatly appreciates the relationship with Glen Ridge Congregational established by Cindy and the help she and her food pantry and kitchen receive from the Glen Ridge volunteers of all ages, and hopes it will continue for years to come. LeWanda also wanted to ensure that acknowledgement was given to Sharon Tobin for her excellent work with the MEND program in general and in particular her assistance with bulk food orders to help



Revs. LeWanda Pleasant and Cindy Reynolds

Bethel's food pantry and meal service clients. She concluded by saying, "I'm truly grateful to both MEND and Glen Ridge Congregational."

**Meeting Emergency Needs with Dignity
An Interfaith Emergency Food Network**

MEND ANNUAL STATISTICS 2010

PANTRY	CLIENTS SERVED	PANTRY	CLIENTS SERVED
Apostles' House, Newark	13,973 56% Adults 44% Children	Elizabeth Avenue Presbyterian Church Newark	1647 36% Adults 64% Children
Bessie Green Community Center Newark	1936 91% Adults 9% Children	First Hopewell Baptist Church Newark	4417 71% Adults 29% Children
Bethel Church Of Love & Praise Bloomfield	7991 73% Adults 27% Children	Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, West Orange	3663 56% Adults 44% Children
Bloomfield Church-on-the-Green, Bloomfield	1327 64% Adults 36% Children	Holy Trinity Lutheran Church East Orange	973 60% Adults 40% Children
Blessed Sacrament Church Newark	3176 72% Adults 28% Children	Interfaith Food Pantry Orange	4455 59% Adults 41% Children
Blum Street/ Grace Reformed Church, Newark	2964 54% Adults 46% Children	St. James A.M.E. Church Newark	12, 661 63 % Adults 37 % Children
Church of the Transfiguration Newark	2850 55% Adults 45 % Children	St. Mary's Church/ Pierre Toussaint,	7433 46% Adults 54% Children
Church Women United Food Pantry Irvington	2911 60% Adults 40% Children	Trinity Reformed Church Newark	3107 53% Adults 47% Children

Each MEND pantry provides canned and staple foods for those in need, and most also include personal hygiene and baby care products when available. Shelter is available at Apostles' House for families. Grace Reformed and Holy Trinity Lutheran also house day care centers for infants and preschoolers. Soup Kitchens are sponsored by Bethel Church of Love & Praise, Blessed Sacrament Church, Elizabeth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Bessie Green Community Center, Church of the Transfiguration, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, and St. James A.M.E. Church.

Total number of people served: 75,484

MEND UPCOMING EVENTS

January 4th- March 5th

Good Nutrition Begins with Breakfast Drive

February 26th

Bread for the World Offering of Letters Workshop

February 17th – March 26th

One Can Meal Food Drive

April 12th – June 4th

Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation Food Drive

May 6th, 2011

**8th Annual Walk to End Hunger
in Downtown Newark**

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A profile including the first names of family members, ages, sex and sizes, along with a list of needed items and a brief family history is sent to the donor. The donor receives the profile and buys 2-3 age appropriate gifts for each family member and a grocery gift card for a store close to their home. Donors are responsible for transporting the gifts to the MEND pantry. In 2010 sponsors included individuals, faith-based groups, businesses, and elementary and high schools.

Reilly-Tobin stated that donors enjoy participating in this project because of the personal connection with the client family. They are moved by the family's situation and usually go above and beyond what the client requests. One of the donors shared, "This is what Christmas is all about - helping those who need it most. My company does this project in lieu of a gift exchange. I don't need another umbrella. Knowing we, as a community, could help provide Christmas for a family in need is so much more meaningful."

MEND Board of Directors

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Did you know...

The number of poor people living in the United States is greater than the population of Canada. Canada's population is approximately 33.7 million. The number of people living below the poverty line in the United States is 43.6 million.

From 2007 -2009 the New Jersey poverty rate increased from 8.6% to 9.4% of the total population.

Child poverty in N.J. increased during the same period from 11.6% to 13.5%.

There is an estimated 799,099 New Jerseyans with incomes below the federal poverty level.

In 2009 the federal poverty level for a two-parent family of four was \$21,756.00. Research for the cost of living shows that in order to cover basic expenses in New Jersey, households need at least double that amount.

Eight (8) of the 21 New Jersey counties have a poverty rate above the statewide percentage: Atlantic (10.8%), Camden (11.3%), Cape May (10%), Cumberland (16.0%), Essex (14.5%), Hudson (14.5%), Mercer(11.1%) and Passaic (17.2%).

Essex County with a poverty rate of 14.5% of the total population has the third highest poverty rate in the State.

Source: Legal Services of N.J.

New website link makes donating cash a snap!

Just go to our website mendnj.org and click on the following new link to make your donation to MEND.



PLEASE JOIN OUR EFFORT

MEND is a local non-profit food assistance network serving communities throughout Essex County. We have many opportunities available for houses of worship, youth groups, schools, service organizations and individuals to help those in need. For information, contacts us:

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*An interfaith anti-hunger
coalition serving the needy for
nearly 30 years*

Contact us at:
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TO:

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