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Perry McDonald

Long lines signal extent of the need in our city

By The Rev. Perry McDonald

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Do you recall what you were doing or what you were concerned about on Oct. 19? Probably most of us would have difficulty recalling much of anything about Oct. 19.

But if you were one of the more than 700 individuals who were lined up in front of the House of Peace, a Capuchin ministry, on 17th and Walnut streets in Milwaukee that day, you would have no difficulty recalling that you were worried about not having enough food for Thanksgiving and Christmas. You would have heard that this was the signup day for a holiday food box that would be given out later to people who registered.

And if you were one particular family, you would recall that you drove to the House of Peace the night before and parked in front, deciding that sleeping in the car overnight was worth the effort to make sure you were able to register for that holiday food box.

The House of Peace will give those boxes not only to the more than 700 people who registered, but also to more than 300 others who are home-bound and could not come to our offices that day to register.

The 21 items in the food box are nothing fancy: a box of mashed potatoes, a bag of stuffing, four cans each of corn and green beans, two packages each of Jell-O, macaroni and cheese and corn bread, two cans of cranberry sauce, a cake mix, etc.

Placed in each box is a gift certificate from Pick 'N Save so that a turkey, ham or other meal items can be purchased.

All of these items are enough to feed a family of five - though barely.

Are there really that many people in the area around the House of Peace who are worried that they might go hungry on Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Apparently so, because the data show the experience of being hungry is growing everywhere.

Last Tuesday, the Journal-Sentinel carried an article stating, "More than one in seven American households struggled to put enough food on the table in 2008." That's nearly 15% of Americans, including 16.7 million children.

The House of Peace, a social service agency begun by Capuchin-Franciscans Brother Booker Ashe and Father Matthew Gottschalk as an outreach from St. Francis Church, has been offering emergency help to the community for more than 40 years. House of Peace gives out bags of food each month. During the month of October we fed 1,176 individuals.

The funds and food for the holiday food boxes and the House of Peace's monthly distribution come from Catholic parishes and schools in the Milwaukee area and from organizations such as the Jane Bradley Pettit Foundation, Michael Redd Foundation, The Catholic Community Foundation, Catholic Knights, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, School Sisters of Notre Dame and Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare.

Benefactors make it possible for the House of Peace to give away new and used clothing, to offer counseling through a social worker and consultation with professionals in our medical and legal clinics. They are partners with the House of Peace because they realize the growing problems, especially the hunger problem in our area, and believe that people have a basic right to food and other essentials.

If you were not standing in line at the House of Peace on Oct. 19 for a holiday food box, consider yourself blessed. And please, give a prayer of thanks for all those who have provided a meal to nearly 5,000 people for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

How you can help

Many agencies help the poor during the holidays. Here are several ways to help:

-  House of Peace, 1702 W. Walnut St., Milwaukee, (414) 933-1300; www.houseofpeacemilwaukee.org
-  Hunger Task Force, 201 S. Hawley Court, Milwaukee, (414) 777-0483; www.hungertaskforce.org
-  Salvation Army of Greater Milwaukee, P.O. Box 26019, Wauwatosa, WI 53226, (414) 302-4300; usc.salvationarmy.org/usc/www usc.greatermilwaukee.nsf

The Rev. Perry McDonald, a Capuchin priest, is pastoral director of the House of Peace in Milwaukee.



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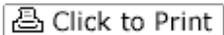
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