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Catholic parishes in Port, Saukville try to raise $17,000 for Lenten challenge to feed 100,000 needy people

Three Catholic parishes in Port Washington and Saukville have taken on a daunting Lenten challenge — raising $17,000 to buy, pack and ship 100,000 meals to needy people throughout the world.

It's more than just a fund-raiser, said Linda Gottlieb, who is spearheading the effort on behalf of the parishes' Human Concerns Committee.

Local volunteers are needed to pack the meals over a three-day period in April, giving area residents a hands-on way to help alleviate hunger throughout the world.

"It's going to be a pretty amazing thing," Gottlieb said. "To see our communities come together for something like this is wonderful."

The parishes — St. Peter of Alcantara and St. Mary's in Port and Immaculate Conception in Saukville — aren't limiting their efforts to their congregations, but have asked other churches throughout the county to participate.

"I want to involve all of Ozaukee County," Gottlieb said.

"I know we have food pantries here in Ozaukee County and there are a lot of people who are struggling. But many of us are very, very, very blessed. Just think, a $2 cup of coffee is how many meals?"

The meals, which cost 17 cents each, are a mixture of rice, soy protein, dehydrated vegetables, vitamins and minerals. Distributed to the needy in more than 60 countries worldwide, they are cooked with boiling water.

"In three months time, these people go from nearly dead and emaciated to plump and healthy," Gottlieb said. "It just builds them up.

"Many of these meals go to children in schools, and for many of these children it's their only meal."

The project is being coordinated through Feed My Starving Children, a Christian

nonprofit hunger relief organization founded in 1987. The agency has four permanent meal assembly sites and also runs mobile operations.

The agency packed 9.5 million meals at mobile sites in 2008 and was expected to make 20 million meals last year, according to its Web site.

The local effort is one of five planned in Wisconsin this spring, the Web site states.

Each Lenten season, the Human Concerns Committee selects an international effort to fund. Last year, Gottlieb said, the committee at St. Peter's and St. Mary's raised $2,500 during Lent and sent it to Feed My Starving Children.

Gottlieb said she became aware of the organization about four years ago after reading about it in a newspaper. She later worked a two-hour shift at the agency's Aurora, Ill., facility packing food.

"It was an amazing experience," she said. "I was so moved by the experience. I can't even describe how it felt. Two hours goes by in an instant.

"It really is an exciting thing to do."

The local parishes have already raised almost $5,000, enough for more than 28,500 meals, Gottlieb said.

"Ten dollars here, $20 there, it all adds up," she said. "Everybody's pennies count. Seventeen cents can go a long way."

About 550 volunteers are needed to pack the food on April 8 through 10. Three shifts will be run each day — more if the committee exceeds its fund-raising goal and can pack more meals — at Portal Industries in Grafton.

"Their facility is perfect for this," Gottlieb said.

Volunteers can be as young as 5, although the youngest helpers will need to be supervised by an adult.

Bulk ingredients for the meals will be brought to Portal by Feed My Starving Children. There, volunteers will use premeasured scoops to pack the meals.

Fifteen volunteers can pack 4,000 meals in two hours, Gottlieb said.

At the end of each shift, the volunteers place their hands on the boxes and say a prayer for safe delivery of the food.

“In all the years they’ve operated this, there has only been two times when the shipments didn’t get where they were supposed to,” Gottlieb said.

The meals are distributed by a variety of relief organizations to the needy in countries that include Haiti, Liberia, Ghana, Columbia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Raising $17,000 and packing 100,00 meals is an ambitious goal, Gottlieb acknowledged, but it’s one she is confident can be achieved.

“If people look at their lives and think how many meals they can pay for without hurting — it’s simply amazing,” she said. “I think that once people know about this, they will respond.

“I hope God works through all of us. This can be something incredible.”

Tax-deductible contributions to the effort can be sent to St. Peter of Alcantara Parish, 1800 N. Wisconsin St., Port Washington. Checks should be made out to Feed My Starving Children.

Anyone seeking more information or who would like to volunteer their time to pack food may call Gottlieb at 284-7288 or e-mail lindagottlieb@sbcglobal.net.