

New year brings new food pantry

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Local effort reflects community demand for services to needy families

Local families feeling the pinch of trying economic times will be able to find some new help in the new year.

A new nonprofit organization, the Saukville Community Food Pantry, will begin distributing food to those in need starting next week.

The pantry is governed by a 10-member board, headed by Executive Director Mark Gierach, a former lay minister at St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Saukville.

Gierach said the pantry has 30 volunteers who will help run the program "and that list keeps growing."

The pantry is located in the lower level of the church, 166 W. Dekora St., a building with ready access for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Despite the church location, Gierach was quick to point out that the food project is being backed by a host of community groups and churches.

"We are being supported by St. Peter's, along with Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and River of Life Church, which is affiliated with Immanuel Lutheran Church in Cedarburg," he said.

"There are a lot of other community organizations behind the pantry, too, like the Saukville Lions Club, the Moose Club, Balance, Inc. and the Village of Saukville."

Many of the organizations are represented on the pantry's diverse board of directors.

Gierach said the pantry grew out of a sense of mounting need in the community.

"Immaculate Conception had been operating a pantry for years, but the job had grown too big for its dedicated but limited number of volunteers, who are frankly getting older," he said.

The IC pantry was a small operation with limited hours, largely supported by donations from the congregation.

Food pantries are also operated at St. Peter of Alcantara Catholic Church in Port Washington and Family Sharing of Ozaukee County in Grafton, but Gierach said even those successful programs have gaps in service.

"We have found that a lot of people in our community have no means of transportation to get to those pantries, so it was important to have a location in town," he said.

The Saukville pantry will be open for food distribution on three Thursdays each month, with

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staggered hours.

The pantry will be open on the second Thursday of the month from 9 a.m. to noon, the third Thursday from 1 to 4 p.m. and the fourth Thursday from 6 to 8 p.m.

“The different hours are deliberate, because in many cases we are talking about helping people in our county who have been labeled as ‘the working poor.’ These are hard-working people who are struggling to get by,” Gierach said.

“It made no sense to expect them to leave their jobs to come and get food at our pantry. Even when times are bad, people should not have to make a choice between paying the rent or mortgage or putting food on the table.”

Keeping privacy and sensitivity in mind, those seeking food at the pantry will only have to show proof of residency in Ozaukee County.

Gierach said the pantry did not do any market research to determine how much of an unfulfilled need they will be dealing with when the service opens. Still, the anecdotal evidence is there.

“We have no idea how many people will be waiting when we open our doors that first day, but we’ve heard there is a lot of need in the community,” he said.

Collection barrels have been placed throughout the community, including at such public locations as Village Hall, the Oscar Grady Library, Kohler Credit Union, Advantage Auto and Dogs in Motion.

Pick up of food donations can also be arranged by calling St. Peter’s UCC at 284-0588.