

Aiding others reaps spirit of the holidays

By Neal Haldane
staff writer

The woman surveyed the crowded hall at St. Alexander Roman Catholic Church and said, "I don't see how they can say these people don't need the food. It's a crying shame."

As she spoke, William Kreitmeyer called out another name and that person walked among the tables filling a bag with some hot dogs, bread and canned goods donated by parishioners, individuals and local businesses.

An average of 180 persons travel down to the church every Friday to pick up the food as part of St. Alexander's Friday sharing program.

"There is a tremendous need in this area even though this is one of the richest counties in the country," said Kreitmeyer, coordinator of the program. "We have people who have a home but don't have any food. They pay their rent and bills and have little left over for food. We can't feed the people for the whole week, but we try and share what we have."

SHARING IS the key word at the Friday program. Not only do the people share food, they share their frustra-

tions and feelings with other people in similar situations.

"The personal contact is great," said Doug Garren, who picked up food one week and stayed on to assist in food gathering and distribution. "We talk to each other about our troubles. We make new friends. It really helps to break up the monotony and it gets us out of the house."

Garren spends 30 hours a week soliciting donations from local businesses and spending church contributions on the best buys at warehouse and discount outlets.

"The people here are hopeful but it is hard for them to come in and get the food even though they need it," he said.

"It is something they have to do," he said. "And around the holidays, the number of needy people increases along with the number of donations."

"Around this time of year the donations always go up," Kreitmeyer said. "People always get in the spirit now but then forget about it after Christmas. There is a real dry spell. I would like that not to happen this year. I would like to have Christmas every month."

DURING THIS holiday season, the church is looking for area families to "adopt" a needy family for Christmas. The needy families have submitted lists of food items they would like to have for their Christmas meal along with gift suggestions for the children. And all the lists are not going to be filled unless more families join in, Kreitmeyer said.

"We need people to come in and take a personal interest and not just at Christmas," he said. "There are plenty of resources around if we all just share a little."

To help establish this personal contact, Kreitmeyer has the needy family giving a small token of their appreciation to the "adopting" family.

"This lets both the needy poor and the needy rich share and everyone wins," he said.

The church also accepts any donations of food money or services like baby-sitting or carpentry work, Kreitmeyer said.

"People may not have the money or food but they may have time or skills that we need," he said. "There are all sorts of skills people could donate if they just had the place to give it to. This is that place."



William Critcher (left), a volunteer at St. Alexander's, and William Kreitmeyer prepare a food meal (above) for one of the rooming houses in need choose items from tables (left) set up in the church.



Staff photos by Randy Borst



Doug Garren helps to gather the food and distribute it to the needy.



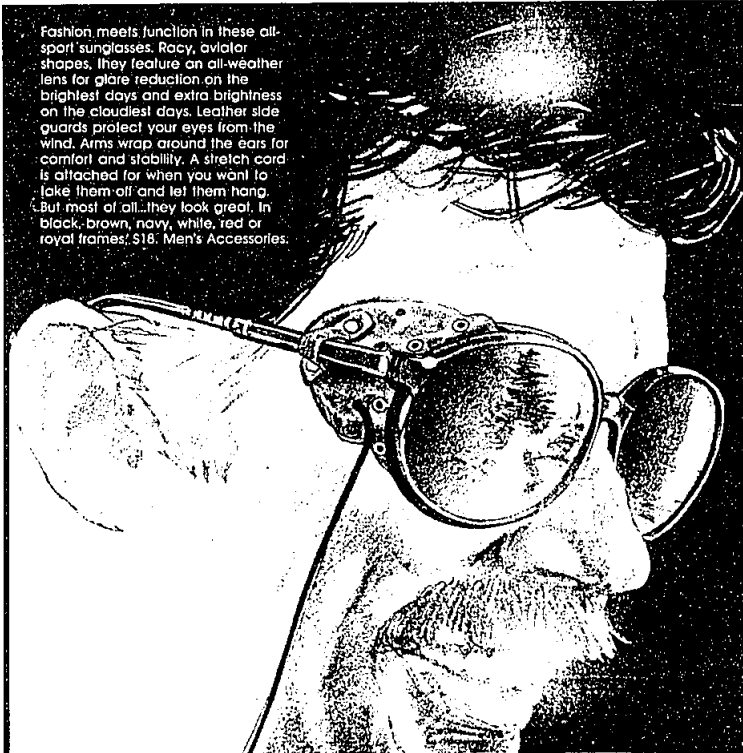
Caryn Schulman (center) and Diane Garren (right) pass out onions at the start of the food line.



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