

# Gas, food prices hurting agencies' ability to deliver social services

MARK PATTISON CNS

WASHINGTON. The congregants prayed at a gas station one block from their church, appealing to God for lower gasoline prices.

But with the relentless climb in gas prices, perhaps an exorcism is more in order.

Members of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington conducted their "pray-down" because the volunteers at a four-times-weekly soup kitchen in the church basement are themselves feeling the pinch of higher fuel costs.

One volunteer said she's stopped driving to the church and instead takes two buses, even though it lengthens her commute by 45 minutes each way.

The rising prices for both fuel and food are hurting the delivery of social services both at the church level and at the diocesan level.

Catholic Charities in Jacksonville, Fla., runs a food bank and sometimes gets food supplies delivered from Miami. But trucking companies have been turning down Catholic Charities requests to bring food north unless Catholic Charities can assure them of a return payroll to Miami.

"They're putting you on hold, saying, 'We don't have a truck available,'" said Suzanne Edwards, chief operating officer of Jacksonville's Catholic Charities

affiliate. "And prodding further and going the next level up and going the next level up, I found out what that really meant. It meant that there was no load that that trucking company had on their books. So those trucking companies were being good stewards of their own dollars. But we're talking about hungry people."

Edwards told Catholic News Service in a recent telephone interview from Jacksonville that the agency found another company willing to truck food from Miami and return empty. "I'm just hoping that with the relationship that we've set up, we can work on their humanity" to keep them making deliveries, she said.

At Catholic Charities, "we try to remove obstacles so they (clients) can be self-sufficient. Each obstacle we've been very creative in past years of trying to find a way to do that and still mentor them along the way. Now, it's one thing after the other," Edwards said, citing increased rent and mortgage assistance and \$3.89-a-gallon gas. "My bag of tricks - I'm coming up empty."

To restock dwindling pantry supplies, Edwards contacted a Jacksonville financial institution and a school system - the region's two largest employers - for a first-time midyear food drive. "Two days ago I got a call from both of them simultaneously," Edwards told

CNS. "They said, 'Suzanne, I'm really embarrassed, but we're not getting the outcome that we were planning. I'm almost embarrassed to have you come and get what we've collected.'"

In the Diocese of Springfield, Mass., the Catholic Charities affiliate could get 100 gallons of home heating oil and pay a reconnection fee for \$150 during the winter of 2006-07, according to executive director Vickie Riddle. This past winter, without the reconnection fee going up, the price jumped to \$352.

"People think that food banks get everything donated," Riddle told CNS. "That's absolutely not true. ... As we all know from the news, it's costing the truckers who take this food across the nation \$1,000 to fill up their tanks instead of the \$400-\$500 it used to cost them." People are getting less at food banks, she said, because Catholic Charities faces increasing demand in other areas.

One area is an increase in federal fees charged to process immigration documents. "When it costs \$400 per application to bring a child from another country, it's going to impact your rent," Riddle said.

"It's an interconnected disaster for those people who are living on the margins of poverty, or have a working-poor income," she added.

Catholic Charities of Tennessee, which covers the 38 counties of the Diocese of Nashville, runs the Loaves and Fishes thrice-weekly soup kitchen. Last year, it served 140 meals a day on average. This year, the average is 170, according to program administrator

Wendy Overlock. In recent weeks, the number has gone as high as 238.

Other agencies around the country have seen the same jump in the number of clients as Loaves and Fishes.

Catholic Charities of Tennessee is now expected to pay fuel taxes on all deliveries. Loaves and Fishes has stopped including milk with its meals as one cutback measure, Overlock said.

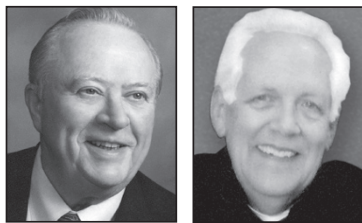
"If we're buying the same amount of food it's not lasting as long," she said, adding that the agency cuts corners whenever it can, but still complies with health codes and regulations and serves a nutritious meal. "This is like running a business," she said. "You can only go so far."

Robert Bush, director of the East Texas Food Bank in Tyler, which serves 26 counties covering 20,000 square miles, said during a White House forum in March on faith-based initiatives that he hoped to get the "refinery price" on fuel for the food bank's vehicles.

Bush did, and his subsequent bill for diesel fuel was nearly 20 cents a gallon lower than at gas stations, but still more than 20 cents higher than the food bank paid when the 1,000-gallon tank was installed at its headquarters this winter.

"We're innovating more ways to reuse more food," Bush told CNS. But given the area the food bank has to cover, he added, "those runs really do add up. The escalating prices really negatively impact the way we're able to do that. We're not able to do that nearly as much as we'd like." ☩

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## Cookbook honors 50 years of parish life at St. Henry

It is in the "breaking of bread" family and friends are brought together in daily life. And, for 50 years Saint Henry Church has done just that - breaking bread daily at Mass and bringing parishioners together to celebrate.

To commemorate parish life and the golden anniversary of Saint Henry Church, a newly-released cookbook entitled "Taste and See" is now available to the Nashville community. With nearly 800 recipes including specialized menus and a "Children's Corner," the cookbook features a collection of specialties from parishioners, priests, deacons and Bishop David Choby, as well as a handful of recipes from the previous two cookbooks to honor past parishioners.

The previous cookbook, entitled "Coffee, Tea and Jubilee," was published in 1980, and the first cookbook, "St. Henry Cookbook," was printed in 1961.

"It has been 25 years since Saint Henry Church has published a cookbook. I thought a new cookbook might be a wonderful way to honor those before us during this special 50th anniversary of the parish," said Chenoa Jacobs, co-chair of "Taste and See." "I proposed the idea to (pastor) Father Mike (Johnston), and he quickly directed me to form a committee and

select a co-chair".

"Taste and See" co-chairs Angela Plasko and Chenoa Jacobs, along with committee members Mariam Kohl, Sandy McCaffrey, Paula Sevier and Barbara Weil, pulled historical photos and information from the church's archives and "favorite" recipes to complete the 380-page commemorative cookbook.

"We printed 2,000 copies on the first run of the cookbook so that each Saint Henry family in the parish could have the opportunity to own a copy of "Taste and See," Plasko explained.

"Favorite recipes in the book include 'Foolproof Broccoli Rice Casserole' from Bishop Choby and 'Chicken Supreme' from our pastor, Father Mike," Jacobs added.

Taste and See can be purchased at St. Mary's Bookstore at 1909 West End Ave. in Nashville, as well as at the Saint Henry Church office. The cost of the cookbook is \$20, and it is dedicated to church pastors, past and present.

Founded in 1958, St. Henry Catholic Church is one of the largest parishes in the Nashville diocese with more than 2,100 families, a K-8 school with more than 675 students, some 60 active ministries and hundreds of dedicated volunteers serving the community. ☩