

Parish giving press release

For immediate release

Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington

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BURLINGTON-- A recent survey of parish social justice activities reveals that Vermont Catholics are serving others with untold generosity. There are 73 parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington and more than 100 active churches.

From visiting the sick and imprisoned, to assisting the homeless to feeding the hungry, the people of Vermont parishes are contributing thousands upon thousands of dollars in volunteer services to people in need throughout the state.

Based on the survey, 96 percent of responding parishes participate in feeding the hungry either by donations to a local food shelf, managing their own food pantry, serving meals at the parish hall or food drives. Most parishes support multiple ministries: 89% poverty; 83% illness/infirm; 66% homeless; 30 prison and 29% other. Parishes support and partner with over 155 organizations throughout Vermont to volunteer, donate goods and money.

The Rev. Yvon Royer, pastor of St. Peter Church in Vergennes and St. Ambrose Church in Bristol, said the various ministries parishes offer help people in the larger community “to know God’s love through the acts of our parishioners.”

Most Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Morrisville, Johnson, Hyde Park and Eden reaches out to persons in need through its SAM – Social Action Ministry – program, which provides assistance with things like rent, utilities, gasoline, food and phone minutes. Spiritual guidance is available also.

“We try to give them hope,” Mary Elfer said of those who seek assistance from the parish.

She is the parish ministries coordinator and considers assisting others as integral to her faith. “We are to follow the Gospel and practice our faith through works of love toward our neighbor,” she said. “Christ told us to help each other. We are supposed to take to heart those in need.”

Ted and Kathy Barrett of St. Jude Church in Hinesburg coordinate the twice-monthly senior meal hosted by the parish in partnership with Age Well, an agency that advocates for the aging population of northwestern Vermont.

Motivated by their faith and their desire to help others, they have been involved in the meals for about 10 years. "The seniors need a place to get out and meet other seniors," Mr. Barrett said.

"We enjoy doing it, and they enjoy the camaraderie, the friendship," Mrs. Barrett added.

The meal program serves about 20 meals at each dinner, and volunteers include parishioners and community members.

Many parishes are involved in providing gifts to persons in need at Christmas. At St. Thomas Parish in Underhill Center, for example, a food project provides about six to 10 families with food and fruit boxes/baskets that include a ham or turkey and a gift card for additional needed items.

"God calls us to love our neighbor," said Laura Wells, coordinator of religious education and coordinator of the Christmas food and fruit boxes/baskets. "When we open our heart to Christ...we are happy and ... want to serve our neighbor."

The parish collects food all year for people in need, but during Advent, the collection is used specifically for the food and fruit project.

The Office of Development and Communications conducted the survey about Catholic parish social justice activities for the Diocese of Burlington. You can read more about the specific ministries and organizations parishes support at: vermontcatholic.org/vcm

"The old adage that 'it is in giving that receive' is made very true through the opportunity to share of one's self through these different ministries," Royer said.

For more information, contact Ellen Kane, executive director of development and communications for the Diocese of Burlington at 846-5837.