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ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX CATHOLIC CHURCH DELIVERS HOPE, BASIC ESSENTIALS IN EAST DALLAS

The Catholic Foundation allows local Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference to meet more needs with \$35,000 grant

DALLAS - The hungry don't get a summer vacation. In fact, summer months are more challenging for hungry families that rely on school breakfast and lunch programs. According to the North Texas Food Bank (NTFB), food distributions are up 20 percent as compared to last year.

The need is apparent at the food pantry at St. Bernard of Clairvaux Catholic Church, an outreach of the St. Bernard Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference. In June alone, the East Dallas food pantry served approximately 450 families or about 2,000 people. The Conference will serve even more after purchasing a new delivery truck with a grant from The Catholic Foundation.

Concerned about the growing needs of the hungry in its community, St. Bernard Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference turned to The Catholic Foundation in Dallas for help. A reliable truck was needed to pick up food from NTFB and deliver to St. Bernard's food pantry, and The Foundation gave a \$35,000 grant in response. Part of the funds came from the Osborne Family Fund and the R. Cardis & Grace Delee Stubbs Foundation Fund at The Catholic Foundation, both set up by donors with specific philanthropic goals.

"The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference at St. Bernard does an amazing job at serving the needy among them," said Ed Schaffler, president and CEO of The Catholic Foundation. "The grant request to help them continue and expand their ministry was extremely worthy of funding, and we look forward to hearing how this grant is impacting lives."

The St. Bernard grant was part of \$697,668 that The Catholic Foundation presented to 21 churches, schools and organizations serving the Diocese of Dallas this spring. Twice a year, The Catholic Foundation provides grants to organizations that demonstrate the ability to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the Catholic community throughout the Diocese of Dallas.

"The new truck will make it possible for the Conference to pick up large quantities of food and safely deliver them to the pantry for distribution to those in need," said Julie Walters, executive director at Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council of Dallas.

The Conference received word that its grant request had been approved in the spring, and the search for a truck began. The truck was dedicated the evening of July 18 by Father Gaston Giacinti, surrounded by parishioners and families picking up food from the pantry.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has 32 Conferences and 13 food pantries throughout the Diocese of Dallas, including St. Bernard's pantry which will celebrate its third anniversary in November. Open from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon, St. Bernard's food pantry is considered a primary food source for those it serves. Records show the average monthly income for a family of four it serves is less than \$1,000. While the food pantry follows NTFB guidelines concerning poverty levels for its clients, but anyone in need has access to the food. A middle class family can become food insecure overnight if a paycheck is lost.

As the check in room emptied out after the Wednesday night dedication, so did the food supplies. The new truck enabled St. Bernard Conference to offer four times more food than usual, but the food was nearly gone with another hour to go before the pantry closed.

“Our strategy is to provide a substantial amount of food so that folks can pay the high electricity bills that come with the heat, keep the kids fed while they are not in school and pay the rent. This goes a long way toward reducing the stress that a lot of these children feel when they are uncertain about where their next meal is coming from. They know they can come to St Bernard Church,” said Barry Reno, president of the St. Bernard Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference.

The St. Bernard Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference is projected to serve more than 7,000 families or approximately 28,500 people at its food pantry in 2012, estimates made before the new truck was purchased. Currently, families are taking 50 to 75 lbs of food each visit, and St. Bernard leadership expects that to grow to 100 to 150 lbs. each visit. In addition, they will open the pantry to target certain Sunday Masses.

“As members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we are charged to go out and find those in need. Getting the truck will have a huge impact on our ministry in East Dallas. We expect the volume of food to double overnight, but there will be no shortage of clients since we are just barely scratching the surface. The Catholic Foundation is providing us a unique opportunity to feed a whole lot of people,” said Reno.

The Conference has already delivered food to needy families in an apartment complex nearby and plan to continue that outreach. They also plan to ask people to bring donations directly to the truck one Sunday a month. They expect the customized truck to increase awareness of their programs.

At any given distribution time, a dozen St. Bernard parishioners are volunteering at the pantry, and an expanded ministry will require even more help. Reno says that they might have to recruit volunteers for the first time, but is optimistic that his parish will rise to the occasion. They often host volunteers from outside the church as well. Cash donations also are greatly needed. The Conference purchases food from NTFB, but the cost is greatly reduced as compared to what a donor might buy at a grocery store. St. Bernard’s Conference can feed more people with a cash donation than with a food donation. Reno says people can help the most by volunteering or making donations and also notes that consistency is key because people are hungry every day.

Not only does Society of St. Vincent de Paul help with food and basic essentials like clothes, the group also offers financial aid to qualified households who need help with rent, utility bills, prescription drugs, medical bills, bus passes, and other emergency needs. Parishioners have developed relationships with many who come to their church for help. Creating a real sense of community, the ministry has expanded to include hosting dinners, birthdays and holiday celebrations, along with lots of shared prayer. Families who receive food and essentials are asked to give a donation if they are able, but it is never required. Many give a few dollars if they can to help the circle of generosity continue at the pantry.

Chartered in 1955, The Catholic Foundation was founded by a group of dedicated Catholic laymen with a vision that extended far beyond the charitable needs of the moment. This independent, nonprofit corporation has dedicated its resources to compassionate charitable giving through grants provided by benefactors through its many planned giving programs. More than \$73 million has been provided to meet the needs within the Diocese of Dallas and the community, through grants to various religious, educational and charitable organizations. **For additional information about The Catholic Foundation, call 972.661.9792 or visit www.catholicfoundation.com.**

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