

## As need increases, shelves are bare at local pantries

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LAWRENCE — Ken Campbell has seen the impact of the economy firsthand — empty shelves and more people lining up at the door looking for food.

Campbell, food coordinator at Lazarus House, said 240 people come to the food pantry on Wednesdays, 80 percent more than last year. Some people get there as early as 8 a.m. for the 11 a.m. distribution.

"There's a solid group of people who always make their donations," he said. "It's just tough because when they do bring it, it gets used right away."

Other food pantries also are feeling the effects of the economy with a decrease in donations of nonperishable foods and more people in need.

Representatives from food pantries and soup kitchens in Lawrence formed the Lawrence Hunger Roundtable to find ways of getting more food donations and to help each other out in situations such as when there is a shortage.

The only items left at the St. Vincent de Paul program at St. Mary of the Assumption Church is one bag of rice and some cans of food, director Chanel Vachon said.

He said donations usually start picking up in September, with people leaving cans of food and other items in a box at the entrance to the church. But this year, the donations have not picked up.

"Our food pantry has shrunk," said Vachon.

Linda Zimmerman, executive director of Neighbors in Need, sent out a call for help to churches and organizations after noticing stores and bakeries were cutting back.

Neighbors in Need distributes food to 500 families a week through its eight pantries in Lawrence and Methuen and at two elderly housing complexes in Lawrence, Zimmerman said.

With less food donations coming in, food pantries are distributing less to needy families.

At pantries run by Neighbors in Need, each family usually gets canned meat and dairy products, as well as canned fruit, vegetables, rice, beans, pasta or sauce.

Zimmerman said they have cut back on the food they are giving out, including canned vegetables. Neighbors in Need gets yogurt donated by Colombo, but there are no donations of milk, cheese or eggs.

"There isn't enough dairy, so we're not able to give it," she said.

Since it serves a large Hispanic population, rice and beans are sought after items.

"Rice is getting very expensive, so people can't buy it," Zimmerman said. "But we don't always have it."

Neighbors in Need was able to get 10,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables after teaming up with Johnson's Farm in Windham, N.H., and Groundwork Lawrence Green Team.

"I'm hearing from people who never came to a pantry before and had never had to look for help before telling me they need food for their children. That's heartbreaking," Zimmerman said.

Vachon said he relies on the generosity of parishioners from St. Mary, as well as other parishes, including St. Augustine in Andover, St. Michael in North Andover and St. Monica in Methuen.

Despite seeing less donations, he does not skimp on the amount of food he gives to families.

"One or two bags of food won't do it," Vachon said. "It doesn't carry them through. I try to make a dent and really help by giving them six or seven bags. It means they can save \$30 and is a bonus."

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Photos



Roger Darrigrand/Staff photo Chanel Vachon, president of the Conference for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Lawrence, has seen the shelves of the food pantry begin to grow bare of much needed staples such as rice, soups, and canned fruit.  
Staff Photographer