



NEWS BRIEF

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ECONOMY DRIVES MIDDLE CLASS TO THE SALVATION ARMY FOR HELP

Growing demands for assistance strain Chicago Metropolitan Division Resources

(CHICAGO--May 5, 2009)—The Salvation Army corps community centers throughout the Greater Chicago area report providing assistance to a new type of client—men and women who never before asked The Army for help. A trend is beginning to develop, especially in the suburbs, where middle class families now are joining the urban poor in looking to The Army to help them put food on the table, pay rent or mortgage, and keep the lights on.

Throughout the Chicago Metropolitan Division, which serves those in need in Chicago and throughout Northern Illinois and Northwest Indiana, requests for all types of assistance—especially help with groceries—have skyrocketed, as rising unemployment and home foreclosures take their toll on more and more residents.

“The weak economy, growing unemployment and home foreclosures have come together to create a perfect storm, adversely impacting our clients and our donors,” said Lt. Colonel David E. Grindle, divisional commander, Salvation Army Chicago Metropolitan Division. “More and more people are seeking assistance from the Army at a time when many of our loyal donors have less money to give or, in some cases, need assistance themselves.”

At one suburban corps community center, food pantry orders increased more than five-fold—from 76 to 459 between January and December 2008—as an unexpectedly large number of clients, including middle-class families, flocked to the center for help. And at one Chicago corps community center, grocery orders rose more than 100 percent in a one-year period, from 1,316 in March 2008 to 2,668 in March 2009.

Another corps community center recently had to cut by up to one-half the amount of groceries it gives to a needy family to make sure everyone received at least some food that week. Instead of the customary two bags of groceries distributed to each small family, center staff handed out one bag only and gave two bags, instead of three, to each large family to try to stretch available food supplies.

The Salvation Army buys in bulk much of the food it distributes to the needy, making it possible for The Army to purchase with just \$33 enough groceries to feed a family of four for a week.

In addition to food pantry distributions, The Salvation Army also provides meals to seniors, to the children enrolled in day care and after school programs, and to the homeless through the Mobile Feeding Program.

Other types of assistance The Army provides include helping those in need pay their energy bills, mortgages and rent and providing clients with emergency and transitional lodging.

Not only are there more families now relying on The Salvation Army for assistance, but the size of those families is increasing as seniors move in with their grown children and young people move back home to cut expenses and pool what resources they have left.

Even people lucky enough to be collecting a paycheck are telling The Salvation Army they're having a difficult time making ends meet. Some say that's because they are taking home less pay each week because their work hours were cut to prevent layoffs, or because they now are supporting unemployed family members.

“Traditionally, people in need turn to The Salvation Army for assistance three or four months after they've suffered a setback, such as losing a job or their home,” Colonel Grindle said. “They first try to make it on their own, which usually means depleting all their resources and seeking help from family, friends and other organizations before coming to us for help.”

The Salvation Army anticipates that requests for assistance will continue to increase at least through the summer. Officials fear that if the Illinois jobless rate continues on its upward trajectory – as it did in March, shooting to 9.3 percent in Metro Chicago – there won't be a let-up in the requests for assistance this year.

“For many people, we are their last hope,” Colonel Grindle said. “Even in these difficult times, we are committed to serving all those who come to us the best we can.”

Eighty-nine cents of every dollar donated to The Salvation Army Chicago Metropolitan Division is spent on services and programs that directly benefit the needy.

For more information about The Salvation Army, or to donate, please visit www.salarmychicago.org.

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