

More New Yorkers in Need of Food

By Jasper Fakkert

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Volunteer Maria serves customers at the food pantry of the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew. She has volunteered there for 10 years. (Jasper Fakkert/The Epoch Times)

NEW YORK—At a time of economic suffering, an increased number of New Yorkers have found themselves forced to use the city's food programs. According to an annual survey released by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger on Monday, there is a 21 percent increase in the number using emergency food services, such as food pantries and soup kitchens.

The sharp increase in food program use has been softened by \$500 million in federal stimulus money, as part of the economic recovery bill passed by Congress earlier this year. As a result of the money injection, only 55 percent of food emergency programs lacked enough food this year compared with 69 percent of programs in 2008.

"The economic downturn has created a hurricane of suffering for hungry New Yorkers, but the good news is that a massive increase in federal funding has provided a food life-raft for struggling families," said Joel Berg, executive director of the coalition in a press release.

"Our job at the federal and city level is to provide food ... To be hungry is a horrible thing," said Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) at a press conference.

Meallie Rudd was standing in line at a food pantry, located underneath the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, on Monday. Under normal circumstances, Rudd, 54, is able to make ends meet, but since she and her sister are out of work, and her sister needing to undergo surgery, she found herself visiting food pantries.

"I usually don't need to come here every month," she said.

Rudd worked in the Army for 21 years, until 2001. Her work in the military included

doing postal service, communications, and military police around the world. Now she is receiving benefits of less than a \$1,000 a month.

The food pantry at the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, part of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger's emergency food program, is set up as a supermarket so that customers can select their own food. With a point system, where each point represents one pound of food, and the number of points depending on the size of the family—allowing everyone to receive three days worth of food once a month.

“Customers select their own food according to the nutrient guidelines, so customers get a well-balanced nutritious three days worth of food,” said Doreen Wohl of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger. She said the average family income of those coming to the food pantries is around \$12,000 a year.

Manager at the food pantry, Chris Gum, 45, knows what it's like not having enough food. He used to be homeless for 23 years, collecting empty cans to survive. Now he is working at the food pantry, a building he used to sleep in front of, as one of the few paid workers. "It pays my rent," said Gum while chucking two turkeys in the fridge.

According to Wohl, most of the workers at the food pantries are volunteers that are actually customers receiving food themselves. With some of the staff working there for more than 10 years.

Thanksgiving

Turkeys for this Thanksgiving have been donated for the poor. The donations, totaling \$50,000 came from a few wealthy New Yorkers.

One of the donators is Howard Koeppel.

"I have always been fortunate that I never need to go to the food pantry. I have six businesses. I would like to give back sometimes rather than always taking. It's a good feeling," said Koeppel.

Gum explains that people can get a 10 pound turkey by using their three meat points and seven of their proteins points. The deal is only available for families consisting of at least three people.

For Rudd and her sister this means no turkey, but instead chicken—which Rudd is nevertheless happy with.

"There are people that need the food more than I do," said Rudd.