

An Important Message from Amy and Norm

Happy and Blessed New Year!

We would like to start out this new and exciting year full of the hope of our Lord Jesus by expressing our most sincere and heart felt gratitude. First we are grateful to God for His Love, His mercy and for the bountiful graces and blessings He bestows upon us and upon His poor. Next, we are grateful to the countless people who helped to make our holiday ministries of 2008 such blessed successes! Our Thanksgiving and Christmas Food Give-aways, our New Toy Drive and our Family-to-Family Sponsorship programs touched the lives and hearts of thousands of people, all made possible by the kindness and generosity of so many. So for all those who donated money, goods, food, toys, clothes; for those who volunteered to help us bag, pack, cook, clean, sort, wrap, decorate; for those who spread the word and talked up our ministries and for those who prayed for us, thank you; on behalf of all those who benefitted from your love, thank you!

We are excited about a new ministry we will be embarking on this year. We, along with Deacon Larry Eschbach, will be heading to various churches of the Diocese of Buffalo to talk about our APOSTLE (A Part Of St. Luke's Everyday) program. We will be letting people know how, by pledging a small monthly donation to St. Luke's, they can help provide a steady stream of funds to help us pay our ever-increasing operational costs. This funding would help us to pay utilities, fuel, garbage fees, etc. We are most grateful to the Diocese of Buffalo and to the Pastors and Administrators of the parishes we will be visiting for giving us this opportunity. We pray God will bless it abundantly.

We know that 2009 will bring with it wonderful opportunities and blessings. We also know that it will likely see an increase in the number of people who come to us seeking help. We are currently feeding between 400 – 650 people a day, 6 days a week. We are providing bags of food to 500 people a week. And we are also serving bag meals (sandwiches, etc.) from our Good Shepherd Residence to over 200 people a day, most of whom are living in the many abandoned homes in neighborhoods surrounding St. Luke's.

It is easy to see how this increase in our ministry of feeding the hungry has greatly increased our need for donated food and for the money to purchase food. For several years, we were encouraged by people to work with the Food Bank. So in 2008, we decided to do just that. What many people do not realize is that **the Food Bank charges for its food**. The price is 14 cents per pound. While on the surface this does not seem expensive, the large amount of food we need to sustain our food ministries from the Food Bank caused us to incur bills of approximately \$1,000.00 per week. We struggled to keep current with this amount, but by October of 2008, we owed the Food Bank a substantial amount. Subsequently, they would no longer sell us food. (We would like to state that because of the amazing generosity of so many during this past Christmas Season, we have been able to completely pay our bill to the Food Bank).

There is assistance available for organizations such as St. Luke's to ease the burden of purchasing food from the Food Bank. This assistance comes in the form of **government grants**. When we first started St. Luke's, we promised God that we would **never** take money from the government. The reason for this decision was based on the reality that when you take money from the government, you become obligated to abide by the various terms and conditions that often accompany that money. These rules can start to dictate *who you can and can not help*. We promised God that we would try our best to help *all* of those that He chooses to send us. We can not do this if we are being told who can and can not receive help from us.

A group of St. Luke's supporters petitioned the Food Bank, explained to them our position of not accepting government money, and asked if there may be some other way for them to provide assistance. Here is their response dated December 9, 2008:

Dear Agency:

The Agency Assistance Program Committee would like to thank you for your application to receive funding in the category of food assistance.

Unfortunately, we are unable to finance your request because your agency has been given the option to accept grants from the Food Bank which are free to our emergency food providers. We are aware that it is your right as an organization not to accept these grants however in doing so you become responsible for the entire bill.

As the Agency Assistance Committee we can only suggest that you consider the community you are seeking to serve and rethink your decision not to utilize the available grants.

The Food Bank would like to thank you for your dedication and continued support to the community and if there are any further questions, please feel free to contact us.

We want to make it clear that we do not have any problem buying food from the Food Bank and the food we did buy from them during 2008 helped many people. What we have come to understand is that the grants they speak of in the letter are government grants. As we have stated, we believe God does not want us to seek government funding. This just means that to continue to work with the Food Bank, we will need to come up with the money up front to purchase the food they provide. Maybe there are people out there who would be willing to contribute money specifically for food purchases. That would be wonderful. What we do know for sure is that God, who has fed His poor for the past 15 years through St. Luke's, will continue to do so in to the future. And He will do so no matter where we receive the food from. It is important for us to remain faithful to our promises to God, just as God is ever faithful to His promises to us.

We continue to trust in the love and mercy of our great and generous God and we look forward to all that He has in store for us in the coming year. And we are grateful to God for providing so many generous and loving people to accompany us into 2009. We love you all. May the name of Jesus be praised and blessed forever!

Amy and Norm