

## Opinion: Feeding the Hungry

By Ted Bergh, CEO, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio

Hunger is all around us. Nearly one in four of Ohio's children live in poverty and just over 44 percent of Cincinnati's children live in poverty. Many churches, agencies and individuals are actively working to reduce hunger. We must do more.

Catholic Charities is feeding the hungry that are often forgotten. Every month volunteers set up Food for All Pantries in rural Ohio communities East of Cincinnati. Much of this area is considered a food desert without nearby markets or even charitable food pantries. These are places in Adams, Brown, Clinton, Clermont and Highlands Counties.

A Food for All Pantry is named for the Pope Francis initiative to end world hunger based on the fact that there is enough food produced and the answer is in effectively distributing the food so all are fed.

All are served without regard to religion, race, or ethnicity. Last month through these rural Food for All pantries served 1,730 people of which 25% were children and 27% were seniors.

And these people have names. They are friends. Whether it's Hank a decorated WWII veteran who receives birthday hugs as he picks up fresh produce and frozen meats or Ashley who is ever so thankful for the extra groceries to get her family of five through the month. Often it is a choice between food and rent. Food for All extends earnings for other necessities.

Food for All volunteers are willing to serve their neighbors. One volunteer who qualified for a box of food herself gave it to an elderly woman who arrived late. There was nothing left to distribute. But this volunteer knew the elderly woman needed the food items more than she did that day.

The Freestore Foodbank and many local churches and pantries partner in this mission to feed the hungry. A focus is delivering fresh and frozen food in addition to a complement of nutritious food.

Catholic Charities also partners with St Leo's Food Pantry in North Fairmont to reduce hunger in this Cincinnati neighborhood. Catholic Charities is a United Way agency that is celebrating 100 hundred years of service in 2016.

Please make it a priority during Hunger Action Month in September to consider your neighbors – especially the children – who are unsure whether dinner will be on the table any given night.

Remember the words from scripture: ***“For I was hungry and you gave me food ...” Matthew 25:35***

Write your congressman and urge support for the School Breakfast and Lunch programs and the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act. Volunteer or donate to a food pantry or food bank. Start a food drive at your church, in your school or neighborhood. Pray for the children and their families to put an end to hunger in our community.

Sometimes the numbers can be daunting, and it becomes easy to think you can't make a difference. Remember St. Teresa of Calcutta who was Canonized on September 4, 2016. She once said, *"If you can't feed a hundred people, just feed one."*