

Church's Mission: 1 — feeding hungry

By Wendy Foster For The Naperville Sun November 10, 2011 11:34AM

Volunteers at First Congregational Church of Christ help to pack food items donated for Loaves and Fishes.

First Congregational United Church of Christ in Naperville is participating in a shared mission with the UCC denomination. Called Mission: 1, the initiative, which runs from 11/1/11 through 11/11/11 reflects UCC's motto of Jesus Christ's prayer, "That they may all be one."

The 11 days represent a focused effort to feed the hungry while addressing food-related injustice.

"Our church is very missions focused, and we try to do things that require action, not just giving money," said Diane Herr, who is coordinating the Mission: 1 team for First Congregational. This just seemed to fit in with the way we work."

During those 11 days, the greater UCC wants to collect more than 1 million items of food and household products to distribute to food banks and other food services; gather donations for hunger relief in the U.S. and in Africa; and deliver in excess of 11,111 letters to Congress seeking support for fighting hunger.

Herr said the project was introduced at First Congregational in October, when coordinators started sharing mission moments during services. "First, we spoke in general about hunger statistics and the goals of Mission: 1," she said. "We also talked about the impact of hunger on children and about our specific goals."

Launching the program Nov. 1, Herr said that, during mission moments, "we went into more detail on the issues and gave a Biblical background for why it's important to participate." They officially began seeking contributions of money, food and letters at that time.

First Congregational asked people to donate \$11.11 or \$111.11 to support hunger relief programs.

"Some people did that, but others wrote checks for \$25 to \$50. There was an excellent response," said Karan Schmitz, one of the coordinators of the program. The church raised \$1,840.

Food and household items were collected for Loaves and Fishes, which First Congregational works with throughout the year. "Supporting Loaves and Fishes is ongoing for our congregation, but this was a special push. It's really gratifying to help people locally. They're our neighbors and friends who need help putting food on the table," Schmitz said. "Donating food really appealed to a lot of people."

Members of the congregation also wrote 90 letters to the president and members of Congress.

"We are very social action-oriented. So we are encouraging the president and Congress to focus on issues that are important for poor people and hungry people and unjust situations," Herr said.

"We asked them to support people in need and make sure that the safety net is still available for people having financial difficulties," Schmitz said.

On Sunday, First Congregational will "celebrate all that has been collected and done," Herr said. "This is an opportunity to live out our faith together. As a denomination, we're trying to break the bonds of injustice and share our bread with the hungry."

Hunger statistics presented by the United Church of Christ:

925 million people suffer from chronic hunger worldwide. This is almost 90 million more than in 2000.

In the United States, 50.2 million people, including 17.2 million children, don't have the money or assistance to provide food for themselves. This is 15.2 million people more than in 2000.

24,000 children die every day from poverty, hunger and preventable diseases. That's one child every 3.6 seconds.

1.5 billion people are in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1.25 a day.