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How these Catholics are feeding the hungry this Thanksgiving

By Maggie Maslak

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Credit: Brent Hofacker/Shutterstock

Thanksgiving is a time of food and family for many Americans. But for those experiencing poverty and homelessness, it can be a time of pain and loneliness.

The National Council of the U.S. Society of St. Vincent de Paul wants to help, with efforts to feed those in need this Thanksgiving.

"Society members work with people in poverty and the homeless 365 days a year. Our parish-based conferences operate food pantries, dining facilities, and shelters year-round to help people in need with food and shelter," said Dave Barringer, the National CEO of the U.S. Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

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"In addition to our year-round efforts, many St. Vincent de Paul conferences and councils do additional work around Thanksgiving," Barringer told CNA.

The Society's Baton Rouge Council in Louisiana annually hosts a big Thanksgiving meal for the community's poor and homeless. They usually feed more than 600 people at the St. Vincent de Paul location, and this year, they are also

teaming up with the city's Holiday Helpers to feed an additional 1,000 people.

"We'll have our Thanksgiving meal at the St. Vincent de Paul dining room, but we'll also be responsible for working with Constable Brown and taking over the Thanksgiving meal at the River center," Michael Acaldo, who works for the Baton Rouge Council, told local news.

"That is such a fantastic tradition for our community...it's a magnificent example of our community in action," Acaldo continued.

In Arizona, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's Phoenix Council helps with the community's annual turkey drive, in what locals call "Turkey Tuesday."

Each year on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, locals will bring donated turkeys to designated grocery stores, to be given to those in need. Last year, more than 26,000 turkeys were donated, and the council hopes to break that number this year.

Additionally, a St. Vincent de Paul conference in the Pittsburg suburb of Sewickley, Pennsylvania will be delivering 100 Thanksgiving dinners to families in need around the area, which will include turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing and gravy.

"It's common knowledge that people suffer around the holidays. Picture being alone this time of year. If we can help, we want to," said John Nard, the president of the local conference, to local news outlets.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a nationwide organization whose mission is to "end poverty through systemic change." They offer tangible assistance to those in need through the various councils and conferences found throughout the country, and are dependent on the support of the individuals involved with each conference.

Barringer emphasized that the holidays can be "a good time to invite people to carry on in that spirit of generosity and put their faith in action by helping people in need throughout the year."

"People are hungry every day of the year," he said.

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