

'I never thought I would have to do this' Open Arms helps laid-off carpenter feed his family

By: Diana Kuyper
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ANTIOCH - A Lake Villa couple with three children walked into **Open Arms Mission** last week. The dad is a carpenter who was laid off earlier this month. Unemployment benefits will barely cover the family's \$1,660 monthly mortgage payment.

"I never thought I would have to do this. It is the first time in 19 years as a carpenter I haven't had work and I have to ask for help," said the dad, who visited the food pantry in Antioch to pick up enough basic food items to sustain his family until next week.

"We are seeing more working families every week coming in for help," said OAM's executive director, the Rev. Scott Keenan. "All the bad economic news we hear about every day is hitting us in our own neighborhoods."

The food pantry, open three days every week and staffed by volunteers, is serving about 250 families every week, with an average of 20 new families coming into the pantry for the first time. "We are seeing many people who are facing layoffs and seeking assistance for the first time in their lives, and we are seeing more homeowners who need assistance."

Cash donations are down drastically at a time of the year when donations are historically low. "Donations are down, but the need is increasing. For the first time in several years, we haven't been able to provide milk and other basic foods. By the end of the week, we run out of those items."

While donations of non-perishable food are welcome, a \$1 donation can buy 10 pounds of food from the Northern Illinois Food Bank and other low-cost sources.

"I know everyone is hurting financially right now, so I would not ask if the need were not critical," Keenan said. "Hunger in our community is real, and it touches everyone from little kids to our senior citizens."