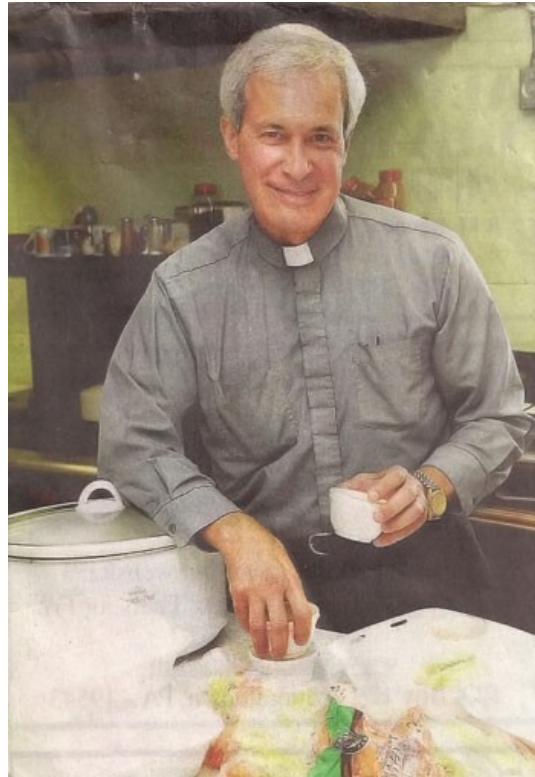


Acts of Love Summer Lunch Program



By Michelle Brenner of the Ephrata Review

The national school lunch program helps low income families meet the nutritional needs of their children by offering free or reduced price lunches during the school day. In the Cocalico School District alone, more than 800 qualifying students participate in this program. Many families depend heavily on this federally supported program in order to manage financially. Unfortunately, during the summer months, these meals are not available to children of families in need. The Cocalico Ministerium, a group of representatives from more than 20 local churches, is attempting to address this need by offering a free summer meal program, entitled "Acts Of Love Summer Lunch Program," to area children.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from July 4 through Aug. 15, free lunches will be distributed to area children at both Denver and Reamstown parks from 12 to 1 p.m. Although registration is encouraged, all attending children will be fed. There are no requirements for qualifying for the program other than a need for assistance. Joe Veres, new pastor of Faith United Evangelical Lutheran Church, first developed a vision for the free summer lunch program after hearing an enlightening message about hunger in our area. In order to implement his vision, he solicited the support of the

Cocalico Ministerium. Through partnership with the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and collaboration with the Cocalico School District, Veres was able launch the summer lunch program.

According to Veres, his passion for meeting the basic needs of children is his Christian responsibility. "This is an investment in our future," he explained. " We should be doing this."

He claims that his advocacy for those in need is a natural outgrowth of his faith and stated the Lutheran Church is the single biggest social agency in the United States." Because of his faith, Veres is committed to pleading the cause of the needy. Furthermore, he thinks local hunger is more prevalent than many believe.

There is ample evidence that supports Veres' estimation of the extent of hunger in our area. The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank distributes more than 16 million pounds of food and grocery products each year to more than 600 soup kitchens, shelters and food pantries. The nation's leading domestic hunger related charity, Feeding America, reports that one in six Americans is fighting hunger today. Children are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of malnutrition. Educational statistics confirm that children perform poorly if they are not fed well. In addition to encouraging better academic performance, Veres views the summer lunch program as an opportunity to offer a tangible expression of love to area children.

"We should be loving our children beyond the measure of what they understand," he said. Feeding America reports that 17.2 million children in the country do not have adequate food that is essential to growth and development. As a result, these children are at risk for illness and weakened immune systems. Research also indicates that families are reducing their food intake in an attempt to cope with the current economic crisis. In fact, parents frequently skip meals so that their children can eat. Families are often forced to choose between paying for food or for other basic needs such as rent or mortgage. The "Acts Of Love Summer Lunch Program" is a compassionate effort to reduce those statistics at a local level. Because of the initiative of the Cocalico Ministerium, children within the Cocalico School District have an alternative to going without adequate food. Although the churches within the Ministerium are purchasing the basic food for the summer lunch program from the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, there is still a need for donations of fresh fruits and vegetables. Local vendors and farmers can join the Cocalico Ministerium in making our world a better place by donating fresh produce to the Acts Of Love Summer Lunch Program