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## Linking together to help for the upcoming holidays

By David Loos  
11/14/2001

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**As one local charity is discovering, the legacy of Sept. 11 is having a direct impact both the contributions and the numbers of those in need this holiday season.**

Preparing for its annual Thanksgiving and Christmas food, clothing and gift drives, LINK--an organization of 15 churches in Herndon, Sterling and Ashburn--is seeing a dropoff in contribution but a 25-percent increase in applications by families seeking aid.

"We're down about 15 percent in individual donations," admitted LINK spokesman Mark Gunderman. "All in all we're doing okay, but the dropoff is almost definitely the result of the WTC [World Trade Center] bombings."

At the same time Gunderman and coordinator Peggy DeWeese said the number of families and individuals requesting help over the holidays has increased dramatically.

"Over Thanksgiving we're expecting to give out baskets to 800 people," Gunderman said. "That's up from 600 last year."

As for Christmas, when the group will be busy distributing food and small gifts, Gunderman said expects about 2,000 people to sign up for help. Last year the number was 1,200.

"There has obviously been an effect," said DeWeese, who coordinates efforts at the Community Lutheran Church in Sterling. "We're receiving applications from many new people."

Many of those in need have been directly affected by the recent economic downturn and layoffs, following Sept. 11, particularly airport employees.

"There are a lot of service employees in trouble," explained Gunderman. "At the airport, people are losing their jobs and looking for any kind of assistance."

Fortunately, said Gunderman, there is not a shortage of volunteers willing to donate their time at both events.

When it was founded in 1972, LINK was an acronym for "Loudoun Interdenominational Network Karing." The organization eventually spread to Fairfax County in 1975, increasing its support coverage to the Herndon community. LINK has been organizing the holiday charity drives for almost 20 years.

LINK members include Herndon parishes St. Timothy's Episcopal, St. Joseph's Catholic, Holy Cross Lutheran and Herndon United Methodist.

The holiday drives rely heavily on all three communities for donations and volunteers. The food, coats and gifts are donated by schools, businesses, community groups and individuals.

This year's Thanksgiving Basket Day will be held Saturday, Nov. 17. Food will be distributed at Community Lutheran Church, and coats will be distributed at Sterling United Methodist Church, Church Road near Sterling Boulevard.

The Christmas Basket Day will take place Dec. 15, with the food distributed at Community

Lutheran, and gifts given out at Oak Grove Baptist Church on Hall Road in Sterling.

Both events will take place from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"With the food, it's kind of like a mini-supermarket," said Gunderman. "They come in and can sel five days' worth of food based on their family size."

Individuals or families can qualify for food, gift certificates, winter coats and small gifts by calling the LINK answering machine at 703-437-1776.

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