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Interview with Dorothy Thompson and Lisa Mazari from The Danville branch Interchurch Social Services

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Event: Interview with Dorothy Thompson and Lisa Mazari, from The Danville branch Interchurch Social Services.

Place: The Sanctuary, 302 S. Market St. Danville. Houses Interchurch Social Services, and the Church Mouse Thrift Shop. (740-599-5673, Lisa Mazari)

Interview: Karla Tibbetts interviewing Dorothy Thompson and Lisa Mazari on Feb. 2, 2001, at the Sanctuary in Danville, Ohio.

KT: how long has inter-church been established for?

LM: In Danville? Six years.

DT: Since July of 1995.

KT: What about in the other counties?

DT: I think Centerburg is the oldest, outside of Mt. Vernon? They joined with Mt. Vernon, I can't remember when it was.

KT: How is the food bank stocked?

B: It's a food pantry, stocked by donations, and by things we can purchase from mid-Ohio food bank, mainly. (Columbus.)

Pp: We serve northeastern Knox county, the food bank serves all of Ohio.

KT: I know there is a big food drive during Christmas, where does that food go, or is it just used during the holidays?

B: It stocks our pantries. The Knox county food for the hungry drive stocks inter-church and the salvation army, for as long as we can passably make it last. What goes into Mt. Vernon stays in the Mt. Vernon branch, what goes into Centerburg stays in Centerburg, Fredericktown, Danville. What's brought in here stays in this part of the county, unless its stipulated otherwise.

KT: How does it work, do people come just come in for help who are scraping to get by?

B: Yes, we're considered emergency services. Basically we ask each person, family who comes in to fill out an intake sheet and give us kind of an indication, they have to prove their income and residency, and we ask them to bring in their bills and expenses, so we can kind of see what their income to expense ratio is to see how we can offer some assistance.

DT: And if there is any way we can advise them in budgeting or anything, we try to advise them that way to..

LM: Or refer them to another agency that can get more serious with them with budgeting, with a

credit counselor.

KT: do you have a lot of families coming in?

LM: We have all kinds of people come in, we see more and more elderly, a lot of single parent families, and then we also see several traditional two parent families, both parents working and still not making it.

DT: Yes, even though some of them are working they still, if it's a two income family can't make it, so then come down here and ask for emergency help.

KT: How many churches are involved, does every church....?

LM: It varies, we don't necessarily get support from 10 churches every month, one month we may not see anything come in from our local churches, but as far as, the Adam group that established us here, that consisted of....

DT: The Adam group that established us here had probably 10 churches, although I think that's shrunk some in the past few years.

LM: during the holiday season, the Christmas season, we see more of the churches around here get involved. And do things that will benefit us. Most of the things that we get from our churches are donations, like the youth group will do a mini food drive, and things like that. The women's group have asked us to speak, and in return they'll provide us with something... after they realized just how much we do.

KT: Are there times you've run out of food.

LM: I've only been here a year, so She might be better to ask..

DT: We've run out of things at times, what we try to do is to fill the bags with what we have. When it comes to meat, the staples and such, we usually go and purchase.

LM: Its not something we can usually purchase from the food bank..

DT: Meat from the food bank is very difficult to come by.

KT: Your talking about the mid-Ohio food bank?

Both: Yes, that's right.

DT: Once in a while we have a family that has cattle or something, just a month ago we had a family donate a whole cow and have it butchered and ground into hamburger for us. Sometimes we get donations from Kroger, if they have things they can't sell, or ah, a couple months ago they evidently had some chicken that wasn't frozen correctly, and they couldn't take the time to dry it and freeze it correctly, so we got 1,000 pounds of chicken from Kroger.

LM: So really, since late fall, that's been our security blanket, is that meat from Kroger, and the hamburger that family donated.

KT: So you never know what's coming, it depends on people.

LM: Its one of those, "the lord moves in mysterious ways," because when were in dire straits it just seems to work out. And were really fortunate to have the local grocery store here, back before we got the meat we have now, we were just panicked, we had no meat, and you know that's a staple for families. And Dorothy said, well, "how do you feel about me going down and telling them to package up 20 1 lb. Packages of hamburger meat." They had it on special for 99 cents a pound. I said well, "I guess were gonna have to." When you went down to pick it up, they said, "its on us." So were really fortunate to have good community support, now obviously they can't do that all the time.

KT: How is all this funded otherwise?

LM: Out thrift shop. Everything in the thrift shop is donated to us. That's what funds our client assistance, financial assistance we provide with utilities.

KT: so people can get emergency financial assistance?

LM: Yes, we can help when a family has a disconnect on a utility, necessity things. I'm not normally going to help with a telephone bill, unless it's a case of a medical reason. In the case of someone with a phone bill problem, we'll often work as a go-between them and the phone company so they can keep that phone. But the thrift shop funds any financial assistance, the food pantry, and our salaries, and there are three of us paid staff members, I'm the only full time. Its not actually full time, I'm allowed 27 hours a week, and Sue, my house manager, she's allowed 16.5 hours a week, and then Dorothy's allowed 11.

KT: I know Dorothy's here more that 11 hours a week.

LM: Oh, we all are here well over our allotted hours.

LM: As of this year, it's the first year than we are responsible for 100% of our salaries, and actually were a little panicked with that. Because in the past the Mt. Vernon office has (don't quote me on figures) has paid @ 50% of the last three months of our salaries.

KT: where is the MT. Vernon branch?

LM: In a house on Gambier St. They serve a slightly larger clientele, but ratio wise, we give them a run for their money. For the area that we serve, out of the branches, we have by far served the largest amount. For example, at Christmas time, we had I think 138 families that we gave a Christmas package to, that means a food basket, presents, and each family got a Bible. Mt. Vernon was just under 200, so were not far behind them considering the population difference. Danville, this area that we serve is considered Appalachian, so we have tremendous

need here.

KT: when people come in how do they get there food?

D: I usually have a volunteer that will pack packs, and we have 2 kinds of pre-packed bags., we have one of commodities that comes from the food bank, and one of regular food. When the client comes in we have a list things we put in this bag.

LM: We call that the extra, it just depends on what we have out there, and what's available.

KT: What kinds of things would be in the commodity or the food bag?

LM: The commodities are the things that the government sets that says that these are things that everyone needs.

D: It varies, a lot of times its spaghetti, rice, dried beans, we do get canned corn, green beans. Once in a while we'll get canned pork or beef, juice, powdered milk.

LM: Just regular items they consider staples. And the regular bag, it just depend son what we have, and we try to match those things with what's in the commodity bag.

D: And also the size of the family, of course a larger family would get more. What we try to do is pack enough in the bags that they can have 3 meals a day for 3-5 days.

LM: In a lot of cases they'll get a big container of rolled oats that they can make go farther, or a big container of rice, or a large package of Bisquick. We try to throw those kinds of items in there that can stretch longer. Its quite a food package that goes out.

D: One of the basic things we try to put in is cereal, we try to keep cereal on hand. We can buy cereal from the food bank at I think 14 cents a pound.

LM: On average, to give you an idea, this last month a family of 4-5 people is generally going to leave with 4-6 bags of food.

D: We have anywhere from 30-40 volunteers who come in.

KT: how long have you been here Dorothy?

D: Since it started in '95

KT: What's your last name Dorothy?

D: Thompson. When we first started this I looked at this space here and thought we'll never fill this up. Two weeks before it opened we asked the community to bring in their unused clothing, household wares, whatever they had, and we started filling this place up. Our first problem was not having enough racks. One of the gals who works here, Sue Watean, her husband and she

used to go to the grocery store and pick up things and if they saw things sitting behind stores that looked like they could be used as racks, why, they'd bring them here. Well, they'd talk with the people first to make sure they weren't something they wanted. Then we had a donation of pipes, and people volunteered to help make racks. And we just went from there, we brought in anything we thought would be usable.

LM: If you go out and look through, you'll see a lot of what's out there that's holding our merchandise, its hand made, it really shows the support.

D: We went from the beginning there thinking we weren't going to be able to fill it, were over-flowing now, with back winter and summer clothing. We have three shops upstairs, toys, house wares, ---. There all full and over-flowing.

LM: It would be nice if we could come up with more ways to get people into the thrift shop, because its amazing how many people don't know the thrift shop is here, or how much we actually have.

DT: And that it is for anyone, not just people in need.

KT: Where do you think your weakness is, where do you need the most help?

LM: We need shoppers, because ultimately that's where the money comes from.

DT: We can always use volunteers as well.

LM: Right now Mondays and Thursdays are our tricky days.

KT: Well, I don't want to take up too much time, I see you have a line of people waiting to talk to you outside.

LM: I had a sheet here somewhere...

KT: I was going to ask if you could recommend anyone else that might be of help to talk to. I was going to go to the Mt. Vernon Inter- Church branch.

LM: The Fredericktown and Centrburg managers are so nice too. Jennifer, that runs the Fredericktown branch she lives here, so she might be happy to meet you here sometime. And they kinda run a different way, were very unique that were housed in the sanctuary.

DT: Our set up here, I think we serve more people than Fredericktown and Centerburg, are food pantry is larger because we have a larger clientele, were different from Mt. Vernon, because they have one building where they do their food, and they have the other building that houses the thrift shop. We have in all under one roof.

LM: I have a sheet that shows how much financial assistance we provided in the year 2000. Its amazing, our numbers are just amazing.

Actually, one of the ladies that helped with the food for the hungry drive, she's a Mt. Vernon lady, but she grew up here in Danville. And, her and her family attend St. Lukes church. She asked me if she could extend an invitation to the people at St. Lukes to support the food for the hungry drive, I said "sure, be my guest." She took a weekend, and spoke at every service, and the money that came in, was such a blessing!! She walked in Monday morning, and the money she was dumping on my desk! She couldn't believe it either, she was ready to explode with excitement. And she said it was those statistics, it was telling them how much support you provide for this community. She said that is what made them open their check books.

Unrelated Chit chat

LM: Department of human services, well, I should say, Job and Family Services, that's a big no, no. They recently offered this grant to the Mt. Vernon office, and they extended it out to the branch community, which I'm so glad they did. It helps with taxables, and food packages. And since we started it has just been wonderful. I want to say we did over 500 food packages this year, 15,000 in emergency financial assistance. And that's just financial assistance, that's not taking into account the food we purchase, or our salaries.

KT: wow, that really shows how much people can make a difference.

LM: Oh my yes, this is a very evident place of what one person can do. Its so nice to be able to tell people that bring things in that its going to stay here. I guess I feel that way, if I'm going to donate something I want to know where its going. We serve anyone in the Howard and East Knox school districts. Our borders range from Howard down to Blatsburg, to Martinsburg, to Freysburg, down to Brinkhaven, up to Greer, Apple Valley-we take care of all Apple Valley. Its amazing the area that we serve out of this one little office. We were talking this morning about how many staff members the Mt. Vernon office has, to our 3. And how much we hustle to put out what we do, compared to how many they have in their office. Granted some of there's are volunteer, but I think we counted of the top of our heads at least 5 paid staff right there at the office, not counting the thrift shop.

I have a young man right now that had some community service to do for the Department of job and Family Services in order to qualify for some of their programs he had to either be working a job or volunteering a certain amount of hours a month. They have no transportation, and they wanted him to do in Mt. Vernon, but that's not feasible when he can't get back and forth. I said, "can he do it for me," I'm providing services for he and his family. so why not, and that way he feels like he's doing something for his community as well. He's done a little bit of everything.

KT: Do you feel this brings the community together?

LM: It has to. Its fun, I love it. I've been here a little over a year, and I couldn't ask for anything more. At Christmas time when we were distributing the baskets... I was sitting there and just got teary thinking, there is just no place I'd rather be right now. I am meeting so many people that, I meet the nicest, most gracious people, and...its just a great place to be. They are so down to earth, and don't take things for granted.

