

I'm just back from a vacation in California. It was wonderful. You know, they have an ocean out there. One night I had dinner with a friend from San Francisco. We drove up the coast and found a restaurant where the Russian River empties into the Pacific Ocean. From the outside, this place looks like it sells catfish and beer, but inside we had a great view of the ocean at sunset, and an excellent meal of chicken and seafood. On the way out, I said to our waitress, "My compliments to the chef." She said, "He's right around the corner; he'd love to hear that from you personally." I said, "Fine." So I walk into the kitchen and find Wolfgang the chef--a young man, about my age, flipping zucchini in a frying pan. So I said, "I'm from Missouri. I would like you to come and be my personal chef." He smiled and said, "I've been thinking about changing my employment." "Employment?" I said. "You don't understand. I'm not planning to pay you anything. I just want you to cook whenever I need food." He had visions of sleeping in my backyard under a pup tent, and I could tell I wasn't getting anywhere.

I shouldn't complain. There are plenty of people who aren't getting anywhere in the food department. Food shortages exist around the world. Our country offers food assistance to the poorest of nations. I wish we gave more; I contact Senators Bond and Ashcroft several times a year and ask them to support those bills which will provide for the hungry. In our own city, many good people rely on welfare and food stamps to make ends meet. Politicians sometimes make us think they're stealing from our hard-earned money, and yes, some people abuse the system. But many people capable of work, <sup>wanting work,</sup> searching for work, or ~~suffering from disabilities~~ cannot find the job that will pay to feed their family.

They need help. In our own neighborhood, the people of St. John Francis Regis Parish give with open hands to the hungry. The quantity of food you contributed to the pantry during the month of July was awesome to see. You have put food onto the plates of the hungry in our neighborhood. I want you to know that I am moved by your compassion for the poor. We help in several ways. We keep groceries here for some of the people who contact the parish office; others we refer to the Community Assistance Council. This organization is supported by all the churches in the Hickman Mills area, the same ones whose ministers meet once a month to discuss the needs of our community. <sup>in our ministry 2 years ago president of that ministerial alliance.</sup> ~~Most of those churches have fewer members than we do.~~ So when the Community Assistance Council turns to St. Regis as they do every year in the month of July, they're desperately hoping we'll come through with enough food to make it through the month. Quite honestly, they ask more of us than they do from a smaller church, because we can do more. And quite amazingly, St. Regis has always delivered. However, <sup>there are other ways to help</sup> we can also work to change the system for the poor. Groceries are important, but so are letters to congress, job opportunities, and votes in the booth.

When Jesus faced a multitude of hungry people, he said to his disciples, "You give them something to eat. You do it." They didn't. So he did. My brothers and sisters, we are the body of Christ. The hungry need food; let's us give it.