

A warm bowl of caring

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GREENSBORO — The Rev. Frank Dew opened Greensboro Urban Ministry's annual Feast of Caring Thursday evening by blessing the food and thanking the attendees who would "help the least, the last and the left out."

"We pray, God, that the day will come sooner rather than later that we can say: 'Remember when there were hungry people in Greensboro? Remember when there were homeless people in Greensboro?'"

Until then, the community's generosity will suffice. Hundreds of local residents packed the fellowship hall at the First Baptist Church on Friendly Avenue to eat soup Thursday and donate to the nonprofit that aids the homeless.

The 18th annual event launched Urban Ministry's fundraising campaign for its \$3.3 million budget.

This year, Urban Ministry's special challenge is to raise an additional \$100,000 for its Winter Emergency Shelters that will be located at First Baptist and six other churches.

The winter shelters are temporary housing in addition to the year-round housing provided at established shelters.

The ministry last year received \$100,000 from Operation Greensboro Cares, a sum that is not available this year.

"We don't have that money, so we have to raise it ourselves," said the Rev. Mike Aiken, executive director at Urban Ministry.

Donors making a \$20 minimum pledge could choose a handcrafted pottery bowl donated by potters from Guilford, Randolph and Rockingham counties or four of William Mangum's 2009 Holiday Honor Cards, with this year's theme, "Moving On."

Helene Bayona left work in High Point early Thursday to arrive by 4 p.m. She said she arrived at the 5 p.m. start time last year, waited in line and sifted through very few pieces of pottery.

On Thursday, she left the church with a dark blue serving bowl and the knowledge that she had helped someone.

"I think to raise public awareness is good," she said. "The amount of money that they're going to collect will be phenomenal because it was a \$20 minimum, but I gave more than that."

Tamara Bagwell, who took donations with fellow members of the Greensboro Woman's Club, said one family donated \$1,500 and didn't take any of the 300 cards that it was eligible to receive.

"We don't want to be greedy," she recalled them saying.

"People are being very generous," she said. "It's very surprising in this economy."

Last year's severe economic downturn didn't keep more than 2,100 people from donating last November.

A record \$113,783 was raised in donations and pledges. That amount surpassed the \$79,200 collected in 2007.

"Hopefully, that same spirit of giving will continue," the Rev. Aiken said. "I'm hoping and have faith that it will."

Before Thursday's event, the nonprofit already had collected \$13,500: \$12,500 from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation and \$1,000 from an individual donor.

The ministry's staff will begin totaling donations today.

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