

To The Needy

House Of Prayer Food Bank Supplies "Hot Meals" And Bags Of Groceries

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

What made two little boys climb into a garbage dumpster to scrounge for discarded boxes of cereal? "They were hungry," says Essie Bryant.

From within the House of Prayer on Beatties Ford Road, she heard them out in the parking lot and when she saw them she demanded, "What are you doing crawling in that dumpster?"

"We wanted the cereal," one boy answered sheepishly.

"Come inside, I have cereal inside," Bryant said. "You don't have to go into the garbage. If you see my car out here, or anyone around here you have them call me and I'll get you something to eat. I don't want to ever see you going into the dumpsters for food again," she chastised.

There are hungry people on the west side," acknowledged Bryant. "A lot of paychecks are not really enough to feed an entire family and pay all the bills. They come by here and we stop and feed them."

Bryant is the coordinator of the Emergency Food Bank at the United House of Prayer. On October 16, she appeared on WBTV, Channel 3, for a program on "World Food Day." "Harris-Teeter was being honored for donating food to the Metrolina Food Bank," she tells. "I got involved because they wanted someone from an agency to let them know what eventually happens with the food."



Coordinator of the House of Prayer Emergency Food Bank, Essie S. Bryant (l), shares a moment with friends before they begin to distribute bread donated

by the Arnold Bread Company. (Photo by Peeler's Portrait Studio)

Harris-Teeter donates food to Metrolina; Metrolina distributes the food to several hunger programs and people like Bryant, through the House of Prayer Food Bank, hand the provisions directly to those who need them.

She and other members of the church, Sister Carolina Phifer,

Saint Joanne Wade, Brother George Williams, and Brother Willie E. Dunlap, operate the Food Bank, supplying people with hot meals, or bags of groceries that contain meats, rice, potatoes, canned goods, breads, juices, butter, tuna, milk and cereal.

There are also Cereal Days when

all types of cereal is given out and Bread Days when bread is distributed. "On some Bread Days we have lines of 25-35 people," describes Bryant.

"You don't have to be a member of the House of Prayer to get the food," she points out. "We help the public. Period. And we don't care what color people are either. If I can help someone, color makes no difference to me."

Bryant, who also works as a volunteer with Mecklenburg County Social Services, does not view her job with the Food Bank as simply passing out food. She cares about the people and what's happening with them. She'll go as far as to make special arrangements for some.

"People have pride and that's all right," she relates. "You should have pride. When they come here and are too proud to take the food, I tell them, 'Come early, before everyone else gets here, and I'll give it to you.'"

"I don't want any praises from anyone," Bryant demures. "I just wish I could do more. I wish people would donate more food and we could do more."

The Emergency Food Bank in the House of Prayer is located near the rear door of the church. The program has been in operation since September, 1984. Bread that is given away on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays is donated by the Arnold Bread Company. "The bread is delicious," describes Bryant about the overwhelming variety and amount of bread the company sends. "May the Grace of God

forever bless them for helping so many people," she enthuses. The majority of all other food comes from the Metrolina Food Bank.

"Arnold's, Harris-Teeter, and the Metrolina Food Bank have done wonders since they began donating the food. They're helping to feed plenty of families and I thank my God every night for their assistance," comments the program coordinator.

By reflecting on the many people she has come in contact with, people whom she's helped satisfy their hunger for the moment, including the boys she found scavenging in the trash for cereal, Bryant analyzes the worthiness of the House of Prayer Emergency Food Bank.

"It makes some mother's child sleep good at night," she concludes. "That's what it's all about."

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