



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Loaves and Fishes volunteers prepare food for homeless people Thursday in Watsonville.

Food pantry needs a home

Loaves and Fishes loses lease at Watsonville church

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WATSONVILLE — For an organization that has catered to the needs of the homeless and hungry since the Loma Prieta earthquake, the irony is inescapable.

Loaves and Fishes food pantry, housed since its inception at the back of St. Patrick's Church, is scrambling to find a new home.

Its lease with St. Patrick's runs out Jan. 1, and the church has asked the organization to find new quarters.

"Using that much of the facility that much of the time is not really that helpful to the ongoing health of the parish," said the Rev. Gregory Sandman, who has run the parish since the departure of the Rev. Mike Miller. Miller helped organize the non-profit, volunteer-run group to meet local food shortages in the wake of the 1989 earthquake. Since then, the organization has grown to serve up to 150 hot lunches each day. It also provides an average of 120 emergency food baskets each month.

But the parish has grown as well, and Sandman said the building is needed for youth programs and parish meetings.

The church gave Loaves and Fishes its first nudge three years ago, telling the board that it had several months to

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Loaves and Fishes

find a new home but would be granted an extension if it showed it had been searching. Miller had been exploring the possibility of funding from the diocese to put a new building on church property, but that plan fell through.

Now the board is back to looking to locate elsewhere, and plans a meeting with city economic development director Ned Madonia to check out the possibilities for taking on some property in the industrial district.

Madonia is unsure how the city will proceed, but said his agency will try to help. "I don't know of any space that anyone's willing to give up for free," he said.

Aileen Madera-Correa, president of the group's board of directors, said she can't fault the church for pulling in the welcome mat.

"Organizations go through transitions," she said. "Hopefully if they do a

job well, they grow and strengthen. The church gave birth to this and it appropriately sheltered it. It may be time for the child to leave the roost — but sometimes it's painful."

It could be particularly painful for clients like Amanda Herrera and Angelina Arreola. Herrera lives with her four children in the Salvation Army shelter since her husband went to jail. Arreola brings her two youngsters for lunch several times a week. "We get food stamps, but it's not enough to get by," Arreola said.

Others, particularly those who make Ramsay Park and the area near Pajaro Bridge their homes, depend on Loaves and Fishes as their mainstay.

"If they close this place up, where will these people go for food?" asked Rosemary Becerra, a regular at the soup kitchen.

Chuck Ross, a substitute teacher with the Pajaro Valley schools, has had trouble getting together enough money to pay his bills, and the soup kitchen has helped him get by during lean times.

"I think it would be a big mistake to close this place down," he said, cleaning up a plateful of spaghetti and salad. "It's one of the few positive things I know of going on; it's not just a free lunch. It's a bare subsistence. What do you do when you have nothing to eat?"