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A Real Ark In The Valley

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On Jan. 4 — the first night of the killer storm — Father Joseph Kennedy had 120 wet and homeless storm victims crowded into the hall at Ben Lomond's St. Andrews Episcopal Church.

He watched the flood waters rise to the top of his church's steps. "At least Noah had some warning," he said.

Since then, the church has served as an Ark, a feeding station, and a center for volunteer efforts in the mountain community to return life to normal.

A disaster fund established last week already has granted \$34,000 to 140 families, according to disaster relief committee chairwoman Annette Marcum.

People who have come away from the government aid center on Front Street with little more than promises

and a mortgage payment to meet have found more immediate relief at the church, she said.

The fund was begun when "the reality hit that it will be a long time before we all get on our feet," and something had to be done to help victims now.

The fund now holds some \$38,000, donated by churches of all denominations, organizations and individuals from throughout Northern California, according to Marcum.

The average grant is \$500, Marcum said. "I don't care if they use it to buy a pack of cigarettes, a spatula, whatever they need. Our concern is to get the dollars into their pockets,"

Applicants are usually referred by the Volunteer Bureau, she said, by other churches or "just by people who know people." They are quickly and carefully checked to determine the amount of their loss. "There might

have been one or two people who didn't really need (help), but they didn't get very much," she said.

The church is also a distribution center for food and clothing, and crews of volunteer workers from as far away as Ripon have come to help valley residents recover from the torrential rains and devastating floods and slides.

Though most of those helped have been from the San Lorenzo Valley area, Marcum said, "We're not turning anybody away if they've got a real need.

The aid will continue as long as there is a need, and we have the funds," she said.

Those wishing to apply for aid, or to donate furnishings or appliances, may call 336-5994.

Donations of money may be sent to St. Andrews Disaster Relief Fund, P.O. Box 293, Ben Lomond, 95005.