



Barbara and Dionisio Rodriguez help prepare food supplies for local charities.

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FAITH IN ACTION

Waste Not, Want Not

BY SHANNON SCRUBY HENDERSON

Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted. John 6:12

IN HIS FIRST SPEECH AS LEADER OF THE CHURCH, POPE FRANCIS challenged the faithful to protect each other and the environment, and that message has resonated with Dionisio and Barbara Rodriguez.

The Middleburg couple has spent more than a decade helping a small food rescue effort expand its outreach. Today, the Orange Park-based nonprofit called *Waste Not Want Not* feeds 12,000 people a week in 10 North Florida counties.

The program was founded in 1990 by Debra Smyers, a Navy wife and a member of Grace Episcopal Church in Orange Park at the time, and who was involved with St. Francis Soup Kitchen located at Immaculate Conception in Jacksonville.

As a way to help stock the soup kitchen, she began asking neighborhood grocers to donate bread approaching its “sell by” date rather than throwing it away, and the response was great. Her church agreed to support the program and house donated

items until a new facility – at its present location – was purchased in 2008 in Orange Park.

What started out as an idea to help stop waste, today has evolved into an organization that former board member and now director Sandra Staudt-Killea says, has distributed 1.5 million pounds of food to needy recipients and organizations in 2012.

“This is truly a volunteer-driven effort, and we’re constantly surprised by the way God provides, particularly when people or supplies are running low,” said Staudt-Killea, a parishioner at Sacred Heart Parish in Green Cove Springs. “We are able to supply more than 100 agencies from the Food Pantry of Green Cove Springs, to Catholic Charities in Jacksonville, to St. Monica Parish in Palatka. A conservative estimate of the money recipients save annually is \$3 million.”

Like the Rodriguez’, many of the *Waste Not Want Not* volunteers are Catholic and parishioners at churches in Duval and Clay counties. However, *Waste Not Want Not* is a ministry that involves churches and volunteers from various denominations and faiths, serving many churches and organizations within the diocese as well as throughout North Florida.

“*Waste Not Want Not* is all about rescuing food that would otherwise be thrown away and getting it to people who would otherwise go hungry,” says Dionisio. “I like to say we’re not filling landfills, we’re filling stomachs.”

The Rodriguez’ were initially attracted to *Waste Not Want Not* by the opportunity to feed the hungry. “We’ve been so blessed,” explains Barbara. “I wanted a way to give back.”

It wasn’t until after they were introduced to *Waste Not* – through the Outreach Ministry at St. Luke Parish in Middleburg, that the couple fully realized the potential of food rescue.

“I never imagined the amount of waste that happens every day!” says Barbara, who has



Sandra Staudt-Killea

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served as the volunteer coordinator for seven years, enlisting drivers to pick up food contributions from supermarkets, restaurants, bakeries, manufacturing plants, farms, the USPS bulk mail warehouse and other suppliers.

For Dionisio, it was also a chance to fulfill a promise. "When I was in the Air Force, my group was attacked in an isolated area," he recalls. "One of the chaplains was very scared. He said, 'Now I know how it feels to be homeless. We have no food, no water, and it's raining. Maybe we will die tonight.' I always remember how that felt. I made up my mind to one day do something about it."

"Seven days a week, we rescue perfectly good food and bring it to our sorting center," said Dionisio. "Then the agencies come to us: soup kitchens, food banks, homeless shelters, after-school programs, programs for the elderly, centers for people with disabilities and lots more. We even have people who pick up food for the homeless who live in the woods. I love that we're touching all kinds of social problems with one solution."



DOH BLINK

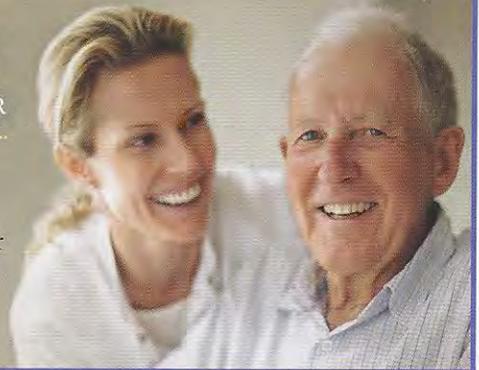
Waste Not Want Not is a food rescue organization founded in 1990. As a volunteer-based organization, its mission is to prevent the discarding of food and other items that can be used to fight hunger and poverty. Food is rescued daily from numerous sources for distribution to local charitable organizations.

Donors, volunteers and charitable organizations are protected by the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996 and the Florida Statutes that provides immunity from civil and criminal liability to those acting in good faith to donate, recover and distribute excess food.

Waste Not Want Not sorting center is open from 9 a.m. to noon every day except Christmas and Easter. Monetary donations can be mailed to: P.O. Box 119, Orange Park, FL 32067. If you're interested in becoming a **Waste Not Want Not** volunteer, visit www.wastenotflorida.com or call (904) 215-3150.

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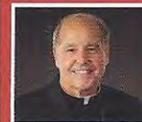
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