



NEWS RELEASE

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Activist Minister Launches Bold Assistance Program; Urges Churches to Step Up Aid to Poor in 'Depression Era' Times

He'd said it with a chuckle when, on Mother's Day, the Rev. Dennis D. Grant told worshippers at his modest Tamarac church, A Place of Restoration, that it was all right, he wouldn't be offended, if they told their friends that they were members of "the gas church."

By then he'd handed out scads of gas coupons to each driving member of the congregation, saying in his homily that these days it seems even the desire to worship comes at a cost—about \$4 a gallon.

"Yes, tell them you go to the gas church," he said, laughing along with the congregation. "But tell them that when you make the effort to get here, we make sure you get back home."

That Sunday, when a single mother with children in public school received the largest voucher, \$50, to get her through her rounds for the week, the activist minister officially added "Project Gas" to a list of four key assistance programs the church will carry out this year in keeping with its motto, "where needs are met."



Rev. Grant and church members prepare for the church's food distribution program.

The church's "Project C.A.R.E.S." (Cancer Awareness, Restoration, Evaluation and Support) educates people about the disease and reaches out especially to those who cannot bear the financial burden of medication and treatment. Support meetings are held at the church on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month, and a fund-raising drive is under way to provide patients with an effective medication that costs about \$100 per pill—far beyond the reach of many.

Also up and running is "Project Appliance," a basic-necessities program the pastor said grew out of an "alarming discovery," in the course of doing community work, that "thousands of South Florida families are living without basic appliances in their homes—stoves, refrigerators, irons, air conditioners, and the like." The church scours for new appliances from major stores, or ones in good working condition from donors, and gives them to families in need.

But this month, the church has ramped up its most ambitious assistance project yet—to provide food, either free or at a deep discount, to 1,000 families by the end of the year. On the last Sat-

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ACTIVIST MINISTER LAUNCHES BOLD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM 2-2-2

urday of the month, the church distributes boxes of staples, including meat and chicken, to families in need who signed up for the program.

“The situation is dire,” said the Jamaican-born minister, whose congregation is largely Caribbean American. “There are elderly people and entire families who are going hungry because they must make hard choices between eating and paying bills.

“These are not people illegally ‘working’ the system. These are people whose resources are being eaten up by ever-increasing costs. Many are on fixed incomes, and many are working, sometimes at two or three jobs. But all of them are poor.”

The poverty rate in South Florida, extraordinarily by national standards, will reach “Depression Era proportions” with a stagnated local economy, an upside-down housing market, a sharp rise in the cost of living, and steep cuts in state and county budgets, Grant said.

Nearly one-third of Miamians live in poverty, according to the Planning Service Division’s most recent figures, and 12 percent of Broward County residents, including 58,000 children and 25,000 seniors, are classified as poor, statistics from the Coordinating Council of Broward show.

“There is a lot of suffering already, but it will get worse and people will be looking for help wherever they can find it,” the pastor said, adding that churches and community-based social-service organizations “must step up aid to the poor” in anticipation of the demand for help.

Grant’s nondenominational church, founded 11 years ago, regards as ministry a sustained community involvement that improves the human condition.

At morning service last Sunday, congregants cheered as a refrigerator was given to a disabled woman, a dryer to a single mom, and a 1997 Ford Windstar to a family of four. Gas coupons ranging from \$4 to \$100 were distributed, as were coupons for \$20 worth of free food and food at a deep discount at Broward Meat & Fish, a local supermarket.

Donations to the church’s outreach programs are tax-deductible. For more information, call (954) 968-7335.



Gilbert Beckford donates a brand-new refrigerator to church’s appliance project.

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