

# East Baltimore man dedicated to parish, food bank

Dwayne Coleman rarely sits still.



Faces of Faith

Despite some serious health issues, he can be found watering flowers, painting walls, staining floors, changing lightbulbs – anything to help keep St. Wenceslaus in Baltimore in good shape.

“I’m a jack-of-all-trades. There’s hardly anything here that I don’t dabble in,” said Coleman, who also serves as sacristan. “You see a need, you fill the need.”

Coleman spends his Tuesdays and Thursdays helping out at the parish, which regularly sees a steady crowd of 100 at its 9 a.m. Sunday Mass.

“One of the things that amazes me about St. Wenceslaus is how dedicated the parishioners are,” said Conventual Franciscan Father Timothy Dore, pastor. “(Coleman) epitomizes that attitude of a lot of our parishioners – that tremendous dedication.”

A native east Baltimorean, Coleman attended the parish and elementary school at St. Katharine of Siena, which was less than a mile from St. Wenceslaus. He remained a faithful parishioner until St. Katharine closed in 1986 and the parishes merged.

"I've been in church all my life," said Coleman, who then continued as a dedicated member of St. Wenceslaus.

A former crane operator at the old Armco Steel plant, Coleman likes to put his spare time to good use volunteering in various ministries. One is the parish's food bank, where Coleman saw a need and again was ready to lend his aid.

"The need was great, but the workers were few," said Coleman, who describes himself as the "muscle" and "ladder" of the mostly female food pantry volunteers.

In the immediate area surrounding St. Wenceslaus, there are few grocery stores, and even fewer opportunities to get fresh foods. Coleman, a recent recipient of the Mother Lange Leadership Award, himself relies on public transportation, and noted that getting groceries to and from a store is difficult.

"If you look around the city, you see so many people that are not necessarily homeless, but food deprived," Coleman said. "In the heart of the city, we live in a food desert."

Volunteering at the food pantry, he said, allows him to aid in alleviating that burden.

At Thanksgiving and Christmas, the pantry usually looks like it is bursting at the seams, Coleman said, but a few weeks later, the supplies will dwindle.

Alicia Champlin, a parishioner of St. Wenceslaus and the volunteer director of the food bank, said she never turns away donations - whether they are of food, money or time.

When she took over the position nearly two years ago, the food pantry was open every weekday. Due to a lack of volunteers, the hours were reduced to the Wednesday and Thursday of the second and fourth weeks of the month. During the summer, when school is out and children no longer are receiving meals through school programs, Champlin opens every day of the week.

The food bank partners with the Maryland Food Bank and receives supplies via The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Champlin has been researching other food banks in the area, and uses the information to help clients.

Since January, Champlin estimated that the food bank has aided more than 100 people, and is seeing an increase as people learn that it has moved down the street.

“We’re letting the area know we’re here,” Champlin said. “We turn away no one.”

Until January, the food pantry, which has been operating for more than 40 years, was located in the basement of the parish center. After the center was sold to a group of Asian physicians, it was moved to a renovated garage.

When the location was announced, Father Dore said that Coleman was in the garage right away, clearing the items that were in storage.

“He was the first one to put his hands on that space,” Father Dore said.

The parish will host a re-dedication of the food pantry, named the Lucielle Fitzgerald Outreach Center, April 21 at 10 a.m.

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