

Parishioner reaches out to poor and lonely

Tony DeLuca knows what it's like to be broke. Twelve years ago, he was laid off from a vending company and didn't know how he would make his mortgage payment.

That's when a friend suggested he call his home parish of St. Dominic in Hamilton where his sons served as altar boys. Through St. Dominic's St. Vincent de Paul Society, Mr. DeLuca got the help he needed.

"I called and they responded so nicely," said Mr. DeLuca, 59. "It was a great thing for them to do. I'll never forget it."

Even though Mr. DeLuca now works three jobs, he has devoted much of his spare time reaching out to others in the community who are in the same kind of difficulty he endured more than a decade ago.

Serving as vice president of his parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society, Mr. DeLuca makes about three visits a week to people in the Hamilton area who need help. In addition to spending time talking with them - Catholics and non-Catholics alike - Mr. DeLuca arranges to provide financial assistance with medical and utility bills or eviction notices. He also delivers donated food items from his parish, along with coupons good for fresh foods at local markets.

"They are surrounded by so much negativity, it's the visit that means the most to them," said Mr. DeLuca, who was honored for his efforts at last year's archdiocesan social ministry convocation.

"I've learned that no matter how bleak things look, just talking to people brings

them back to life," he said. "I try to talk about the good things about their family and the things they like to do and the dreams they used to have."

Mr. DeLuca recalled an elderly woman he visited who was caring for three grandchildren. Suffering from diabetes, she lost toes from her disease before dying.

"She just got so excited when I visited," said Mr. DeLuca. "She knew there was someone who cared."

St. Dominic parishioners strongly support the St. Vincent de Paul Society, even though the registered number of parishioners has shrunk dramatically over the last two decades, Mr. DeLuca said.

"The pantry is always stocked," he said. "They are so generous, it's unbelievable."

Mr. DeLuca said his faith has always been strong and he feels humbled by his service to others.

"It makes you feel good," said the member of the Knights of Columbus. "We're able to make a difference."