

‘Changing Lives Forever!’ Church hosting Program focused on Systemic Change

By: The Brazil Times

You don’t have to look far to find groups in Clay County pulling together to help the area’s less fortunate.

Food, clothing, housing and even money is collected and funneled through various channels to those who need it.

But many area leaders will tell you these efforts, while outstanding, are only short-term solutions.

“In working among the poor, our focus must be broader than any one particular problem; we must aim beyond providing for immediate needs with food, clothing and shelter,” Annunciation Church Fr. John Hollowell said. “Systemic change focuses on assisting the poor to change the overall structures within which they live. It looks to the individual being able to develop strategies by which they can emerge from poverty.”

Hollowell’s church is backing an effort to provide resources for that systemic change.

Annunciation SVdP has become a certified facilitator of a National St. Vincent de Paul program called “Changing Lives Forever.” Individuals, chosen through an application process, will attend 16- to 18-week systemic change sessions with trained professional St. Vincent de Paul individuals. This mentoring program provides education and skill development, supportive relationships, social and professional connections, spiritual growth and community engagement.

“Our goal is to engage in the identification of the root causes of their poverty and create strategies, including advocacy, to change those structures, which keep them in poverty,” Hollowell said. “We will help families make a significant improvement for themselves and our community.”

Like many churches and volunteer organizations in the area, Annunciation St Vincent de Paul Society has focused on funding its SVdP food pantry, which is open every Tuesday from noon to 2 p.m. Those efforts will continue, Hollowell said, “in addition to the new goal, to help individuals so that they do not have to use the food pantry.

“Through the food pantry we have created great relationships with a lot of people in our community and feel we have a great opportunity to do more,” he continued.

Further aiding the efforts, the “Changing Lives Forever” program was selected by local organizations “Guys Who Give Clay County” and “The Clay Community Foundation” to fund the first session, along with help through fundraisers at the church.

The program is made up of a one, three-hour session per week for 16 to 18 weeks.



Registration deadline for this program is set for July 21 and applicants will be notified of when