

Please give so others can eat

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"In charity there is no excess."

-- Sir Francis Bacon, English author and philosopher (1561 - 1626)

Think about how it must feel to know your children are hungry and there's nothing you can do about it.

Now think about the fact hunger is not only a phenomenon of, for example, the developing world. It is happening in Hamilton. It is happening to our friends, our family members, our neighbours. This is not about "other people." It is about us.

The demand for Christmas food hampers for the poor has ballooned by 20 per cent this year. A total of 12,375 families and individuals have signed up for the hampers this year, up from 10,347 last year. This year's hampers will feed between 25,000 and 30,000 people -- our friends, our family members, our neighbours.

There is no doubt this recessionary year has been very difficult in our city. The welfare caseload skyrocketed by almost 3,000 cases in a year, with 12,883 welfare cases in Hamilton in September. It's the city's highest caseload since 2000.

Food bank use in general increased by more than 26 per cent this year over last, largely driven by the economic crisis. People who at one point were donors to food banks have become clients as their own lives have changed dramatically through the recession.

By the end of this year, the City of Hamilton will have spent more than \$500,000 to help keep our neediest residents from going hungry. That includes a \$100,000 commitment to Hamilton Food Share for the Christmas hampers. The value of the hampers will be about \$928,000.

Hamilton Food Share is worried there will not be enough to go around. Its holiday food drive began yesterday and continues until Dec. 24 -- the goal is to fill those hampers.

That's where Hamiltonians come in. As members of this community, our help can go a long way to feeding those in need. Certainly many of us are not rolling in cash, but there is value in contemplating how we are apportioning what money we do have. And in such a season of excess, would it hurt to pull back on ourselves and donate what we save to the food bank?

Grocery shopping can become a feel-good excursion if we shop for a needy person as well as ourselves. It would feel even better if we take our children along and explain why we're buying an extra box of cereal and double the usual amount of tomato sauce and pasta. And if we want our dollars to go as far as possible, cash donations are the best route -- every \$1 donated to Hamilton Food Share translates into \$10 worth of purchasing power.

Yes, we may have to make a few sacrifices to come up with a donation. But think about how it would feel if you knew your own children were hungry and there was nothing you could do.

So many of our friends, our family members and our neighbours may have no food to eat this holiday season. The rest of us have much food for thought.