

Christian Action Center Is Unsung Hero

To the Editor:

During the last few months, this newspaper has recognized a number of groups and individuals who have really stepped up to help our community slog through these long and scary COVID-19 days. I'd like to highlight another group, one you've probably never heard of.

Does the name Christian Action Center ring a bell? Good. They prefer to serve "under the radar." But good work done quietly is all the more worthy of praise.

For nearly a half century, this organization has organized and facilitated a free meal program, usually called the soup kitchen network or community meal network, for anyone in need, no questions asked. Furthermore, it operates with no paid employees, even part-time, and with no government funds.

So exactly how is this rabbit pulled out of the hat?

By publishing a monthly calendar, the Christian Action Center coordinates the volunteer food ministry of about 20 churches, plus Touro Synagogue and one or

two social service agencies. A few downtown churches serve meals from their own facilities; those in Middletown and Portsmouth serve from a cooperating downtown church, mostly either St. Paul's United Methodist Church or the United Baptist Church.

Participating churches buy the food, prepare the meals, serve them, and clean up afterwards. Leftover food is usually taken to the McKinney Shelter or Lucy's Hearth.

But what happened when COVID-19 hit? Wasn't it dangerous to serve meals to a bunch of strangers, many of whom live in crowded living conditions? Think of what could happen.

Well, I'll tell you. A few, very few, churches dropped out, and of course they had understandable reasons. Many of their members were old and thus more vulnerable. But most of the churches kept on serving.

Of course, there were adjustments. The Christian Action Center kept in touch with the R.I. Department of Health and followed its recommendations. No more lining up for individually served meals

in the church dining room, and no more use of china and reusable utensils. Instead, meals were served in paper bags, with plastic utensils, spread out on an outside table. Guests coming for a meal maintained social distancing and wore face masks. Clean up, with lots of hand sanitizer, was simple, mainly taking down the tables and delivering any extra meals.

What happens when the weather turns cold and they can't serve meals outside? C'mon, do you think that will stop these church folks? One way or another, they will provide meals for those in our community who need them. Well, who actually runs the Christian Action Center? Ah, that's a secret. But I'll tell you the first names of the center's officers, who do almost all of the facilitating and coordinating (with a bazillion phone calls and emails): Christine, Dick, Maggie and Pauline.

Unsung heroes? Let's sing, or pray, or just be thankful that we have people like this in our community.

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