

# STORM-STRUCK MISSION BACK IN BUSINESS

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Coney Island Lighthouse Mission has raised about a third of the \$100,000 it needs to rebuild—enough to buy some appliances and resume its food pantry's and soup kitchen's full schedule.

This week, the Coney Island Lighthouse Mission, which was devastated during Superstorm Sandy, is slated to resume its full schedule of providing food for the community's needy—a group it expects will have grown by about 30% because of the October storm.

The mission, which runs a food pantry and a soup kitchen, has raised roughly \$30,000 towards the \$100,000 it needed to rebuild. That was enough to buy some appliances and make a down payment for a contractor to reconstruct the space that served roughly 4,000 people before the storm. The mission's schedule remains the same: The food pantry will be open on Tuesday and Thursday and the soup kitchen will serve a hot meal on Friday.

"We are getting back on track," said Rev. Vincent Fusco, who started the mission in 2004 and runs it along with a small nondenominational church located in the same space. "We are very excited and the community is just overjoyed."

Mr. Fusco said that the mission has been providing emergency relief whenever possible since the storm hit, and has found that the people lining up for aid have increased by roughly 1,000.

"There are a lot more hungry people here since the storm," he said. Hunger has increased because some food pantries and super markets remain closed at a time when many lost jobs and their homes because of the storm, experts said.

Food pantries and soup kitchens in the city were struggling even before the storm. Last year, hunger-relief organizations citywide faced a 5% spike in demand on top of a 12% increase in 2011, according to the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. Yet more than two-thirds of the groups reported a decrease in government funding, and more than half reported decreases in private support during the same period.

Due to the increased need, Mr. Fusco plans to add a hot meal on Wednesdays beginning in mid-April, though he isn't sure how he will fund that. He still owes the contractor \$70,000.

"We are a faith based organization," he said. "We have to trust in God." Mr. Fusco doesn't have a wealthy congregation to tap for funds. There are only about 40 people in the congregation and many are on welfare. Most of the money for the mission's \$293,000 annual budget comes from government grants.

Meanwhile, the Mission's private insurance didn't pay out a dime for the rebuilding and Mr. Fusco is still waiting for funds from FEMA. So far, the vast majority of the mission's rebuilding funds—\$25,000—came from United Way of New York City, a long-time supporter of the organization.

"The mission has always stood out as a great example of an organization that's really small but has a high impact," said Sheena Wright, the president and chief executive of United Way of New York City who started her job the day Sandy hit. "If the lighthouse can get back and be a place where the most vulnerable people can go to for help it would be an inspiration for hope in the community."