

Faith, hope and charity

■ Hold fast to your courage, the Island's spiritual advisers say — and please don't forget those who need a helping hand

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The economic downturn made so plain by rampant foreclosures, a declining stock market and record unemployment has not escaped pews and pulpits across Long Island.

It has shown up in dwindling collections, barren food pantries, and homilies and sermons that urge parishioners to steady themselves with hope, faith and charity through these uncertain times.

For Sedgwick Easley, who pastors Hempstead's Union Baptist Church, that message on a recent Sunday stretched back to a shipwrecked Paul, who told his men in stormy seas to hold fast their courage, that only the ship would be lost. In a sermon called "Even If the Ship Goes Down," Easley told his congregation to "hold on to the broken pieces, because God is a deliverer."

"God always has a word for his people and we always try to make this ancient text relevant in a new day," Easley said. "People want to know, 'When my ship is rocking, how do I see God?' Ameri-

ca's ship is going down economically, we see it now, but God is going to provide. In times like these, people run to the church."

They come for spiritual balm, as well as food, clothing and financial help, Easley said. The church has a food and clothing pantry and helps pay parishioners' bills.

Indeed, churches have been a kind of canary in the coal mine in this financial crisis, said Thomas Goodhue, who heads the Long Island Council of Churches, a group of 800 places of worship.

In Riverhead, he said, the number of seniors asking for aid from his organization has risen from about two a month three years ago, to nearly 125 now. Goodhue said the Bible passage about nations being judged by how they treat their most vulnerable keeps speaking to him.

"We are seeing working people turning to soup kitchens

and a dramatic increase in the requests for help from white-collar workers," he said. "I have always talked about our neighbors in need, but there is certainly more to talk about now. We are trying to engage congregations to figure out why their neighbors are in need. And what sort of public policy we need to push for."

In fact, in his homily this morning, the Rev. Bill Brisotti of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in Wyandanch, will turn to public policy, specifically Suffolk County budget cuts that threaten a slew of community programs. For him, the parable of Christ's disciples feeding 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish offers the faithful a message of sharing. He said he noticed a drop-off in collections and an uptick in people seeking aid.

"Faith is always going to be important, but how does

faith move us to act?" he asked. "It's a time to really reflect and do the best we can and help one another. The scriptures should be challenging us to be more sensitive to people who are suffering even more than we are."

His message to his congregation will be to check on that senior citizen down the block. To make sure that single mother can see her way through the month.

It is similar to what Rabbi Noah Gradofsky, of the Temple Israel in Long Beach, told his congregation during the High Holy Days last week, and a message he will continue to press on next week's sabbath.

"One of the fairly powerful lines of Jewish liturgy is that prayer, repentance and charity ease the harshness of the decree," Gradofsky said. "During hard times, when we

look at discretionary spending, we have to make sure that we don't see the money we give to charity as the first thing to go, we want it to be the last thing. The charity that we do is what may well ease the harshness of the financial decree for others."

This morning, Easley said he will address the current economic strain bearing down on his flock.

"America is in a storm, a major storm, but we know that God is going to take care of us. We believe that by faith," Easley said. "It's no longer just the poor getting poorer, it's all of us now."



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RABBI NOAH GRADOFSKY
TEMPLE ISRAEL IN LONG BEACH



NEWSDAY FILE PHOTO



>>IN CONGRESS

House Dems to tackle economy after election

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — After consulting with Barack Obama, Democratic leaders are likely to call Congress back to work after the election in hopes of passing legislation that would include extended

jobless benefits, money for food stamps and possibly a tax rebate, officials said yesterday.

The bill's total cost could reach \$150 billion, these officials said. The officials stressed that no final decisions have been made.

They spoke on condition of

anonymity, saying they did not want to pre-empt a formal announcement. House Democrats have announced plans for an economic forum tomorrow "to help Congress develop an economic recovery plan that focuses on creating jobs and strengthening our econo-

my." Democrats said Obama's campaign has been involved in discussions on a possible stimulus package. Obama, running ahead in the polls, has outlined his own proposals for stimulating the economy.

Democrats are increasingly confident of capturing the

White House and increasing their majorities in the House and Senate on Nov. 4. If they are successful, a lame-duck session of Congress two weeks later would allow them to start work on a response to the credit crunch that has sent stock prices plummeting.