New director sees change in future

By Karen Naumann
Staff writer

Lafayette Catholic Service Centers will be forced to change and expand, predicted new executive director Justin Green.

"As government does less, the private sector has to do more," he said. "As Americans, we will have to do more on our own to help the less fortunate."

The agencies Green supervises now depend heavily on volunteers and donations. The Monsignor A.O. Sigur Service Center, the New Life Center in Opelousas, the Bishop Harry Flynn Hospitality Center, the St. Joseph Shelter for Men, St. Joseph's Diner, the Charity Depot, the Shalom House Family Shelter and the Emmanuel House Family Shelter in Scott operated last year on $2.8 million in donations and 52,087 volunteer hours.

With less government assistance, including food donated by the Department of Agriculture, the Catholic Service Centers will be "depending on the generosity of people to fill the gaps," he said.

Green also sees the role of the centers evolving. Centers can no longer provide food, shelter and clothes, he said. They must also educate and help the poor find jobs and resources.

The New Life Center in Opelousas will try to meet the needs of a changing society by providing shelter to women, pregnant teens and children.

The population of homeless women and children is growing all the time.

"There are very few places in town where homeless women and children can find shelter," Green said. "We need to get them educated so that they can put their lives back together, so that they don't have to be in a shelter again."

He said it is important to get the children off the streets so that they can break the cycle of poverty.

"We are going to try to break the cycle of kids born into poor families winding up poor themselves," he said.

Green, a New Orleans native, will begin the executive director job three weeks after taking the job, replacing Sister Patricia Cairns, who is now serving the poor elsewhere.

Green was a higher education administrator in Minnesota. He primarily raised funds for St. Mary University, a Catholic university. After working at St. Mary's for seven years, Green said it was time for a change.

This job is different for the former political science professor. Before taking the job, Green said he had never been in a shelter.

Green said he took the job so that he could use his experience in management and money-raising for the church and the poor.

"I've always wanted to do something for the church," he said. "Now I can take what God gave me in talent and experience and put it to work here."

He also said the location of the job had a lot to do with his decision.

"The people in Southwest Louisiana are some of the best people in the world," he said.

As proof, he cited the volunteers, donations and hospitality.

Donations in 1995:
$2.8 million

Volunteer hours:
52,087

Among the Challenges:

Population of homeless women and children growing throughout Acadiana.