The experts are telling us that, like the Great Depression, these economic developments will affect a generation. Standing with the poor through seven recessions over the past fifty-eight years tells us that the impact will reverberate even beyond that. While some may see the sacrifice, others see the opportunity to invite more gratitude and generosity into their daily lives. And while some hoard and fear for their own families, others invest in those most threatened by the economy as another way of investing in their own children’s futures. We share their hope that by narrowing the chasm between the have and have nots in this generation, we insure more opportunity for spiritual and social cohesion in the next. Perhaps these difficult times will produce another generation like the one that established St. Anthony’s Dining Room 1956.

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Beginning May 1, 2009 federal SSI cost of living increases will be reduced from $907 maximum to $870. As of December 1, 2008, the SSI/SSP benefit level will also reduce by 2.3% resulting in a monthly decrease of $20 for individuals and $35 for couples. The Governor made a series of “line item” vetoes after the budget for 2008-2009 was approved in September, 2008, making additional cuts to senior programs: • Home Delivered Meals—cut $629,000 in State general funds • Congregate Nutrition Program—cut $253,000 in State general funds • Brown Bag Program—cut $60,000 in State general funds

79 percent of elderly renters living alone in San Francisco are unable to make ends meet.
I immediately started feeling more like my own self, like I could do something. Sleeping at the bus station wasn’t OK, and I had something to offer. This is Larry’s second week in his job search after spending a month preparing resumes and honing his interview skills at the Employment Program Technology Lab (a partnership with Network Ministries) and six months in St. Anthony’s Father Alfred Center drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. While the Father Alfred Center helps men in recovery develop life and employment skills, at three times the drug and alcohol recovery success rate of other city recovery programs, available jobs in the San Francisco metro-area are down by 3,000 since last year. Unemployment in San Francisco is nearly double what it was in 2008 making the competition for jobs tighter than ever. While lining up the steps to regain employment, low- and no-income jobseekers have an additional obstacle: obtaining “hire me” clothes on a strict budget. With the help of the Clothing and Housewares Program Larry now has in his possession an interview outfit that will signal to a prospective employer his readiness to be a reliable, valued employee.

“I’m out there every day, either online or knocking on doors or printing resumes.”

—Larry, client of five St. Anthony Foundation Programs

Unemployment in San Francisco is nearly double what it was in 2008.
LIKE ANY MOTHER, PATRICIA wants the best for her children. She lives in a small Tenderloin apartment with her husband, Isaac, and their five children. The day-to-day struggles of making rent, taking care of the children, and putting food on the table have gotten more and more difficult; lately, it has been hard enough just to get by.

Four months ago, Isaac was laid off from his job as a cook at a local restaurant. He recently picked up part-time work with another restaurant, but at three days per week the hours are not enough to make a living, much less provide for a family of seven. Isaac is ineligible for unemployment because he is working; yet he does not work enough to qualify for employee benefits, and his paycheck is not enough to support the family.

A sustainable income for a family of four in San Francisco is approximately $60,000 per year—drastically more than Isaac earns working part-time. The cuts to Isaac’s salary have made it extremely difficult for the family to afford basic necessities like food, rent, healthcare, and clothing for their children. Last month they had to take out a loan to pay the rent, which they are now repaying $15 each month.

Now more than ever, Patricia and Isaac have been reaching out to community resources like St. Anthony Free Medical Clinic to provide stability and help get them through these difficult times. Located just down the block from their apartment, the Clinic is one of San Francisco’s oldest and largest free medical clinics and the sole provider of free pediatric care in the neighborhood. Each year, the Clinic cares for more than 3,500 uninsured poor and homeless patients.

With the city’s skyrocketing unemployment rates and an exceedingly high cost of living, it is no wonder more and more families are turning to St. Anthony’s and other community clinics for their medical care. More than 70,000 San Franciscans lack health insurance, a number that will likely rise as unemployed or underemployed families lose employer-based medical coverage. At the same time, city-wide budget cuts have reduced the availability of other safety net services for families most in need. For uninsured families like Isaac and Patricia’s, the Clinic is a lifesaver.

Patricia learned of the Clinic from a friend. “I didn’t know where to go for medical attention. A friend of mine said ‘I know where to take you, I know of a medical clinic where they’ll see you for free.’” The Clinic has become a lifesafer for the family. Dr. Katy Broner provides primary care, immunizations, and well-child check-ups, and helps them access the Clinic’s range of specialty care like allergy treatment and podiatry. The Clinic’s onsite pharmacy and dispensary allows them to pick up their medications, free of charge, without having to travel across town.

The Clinic has also been a point of entry for other St. Anthony’s services. Dr. Broner has referred Patricia to St. Anthony’s Clothing and Housewares Program for help obtaining school clothes for her children, and to the Social Work Center to consult with a social worker about rental assistance. “I know if I need something, I come here. I know the doctors will take care of me,” Patricia says. “Whatever problem I have, I always come looking for Dr. Broner.”

Isaac continues his search for full-time work. Patricia, always with her children’s success in mind, has begun taking English classes to help them with their schoolwork.

With a restored sense of stability, Patricia is hopeful for the future and grateful for the sense of community that she finds in the Clinic.

“I know a lot of people affected by the economic crisis and am glad that I can come here. It’s the only place I know of where people without any money can still get medical attention.”

More than 70,000 San Franciscans already lack health insurance.
T he economic crisis has filled our minds, news and conversations with many troubling questions, from the highest economic strata down to grassroots organizations. All seem to conclude with one resounding answer: uncertainty. On this block of the Tenderloin, the thing we are certain of is that cuts to other agencies will directly result in more people coming to St. Anthony’s for services. “They just keep coming, more and more every month,” lamented Rosita Nangca, St. Anthony Volunteer. “And now people are coming from all over, usually it’s just from our neighborhood [Tenderloin] but now from Daly City, from everywhere.”

Rosita is not only a volunteer, but a participant in St. Anthony’s Brown Bag program. Every third Thursday of the month St. Anthony Dining Room holds its Senior Brown Bag program, providing 200 seniors with groceries including fresh produce, juice, eggs, beans, rice and other pantry and nutritional staples. Currently our Brown Bag program is stretching to accommodate 215 seniors, stating the program maximum of 200. Each quarter we open enrollment and usually all new participants are accepted. For the first time ever this quarter, we were not able to accommodate all the seniors, and a waitlist was started.

Rosita and her husband, a Navy veteran, live in a Tenderloin building along with other seniors, many of whom are also veterans. She helps the seniors who cannot leave their apartments due to disabilities and age by bringing them groceries and cooking community meals. The energetic core of her family and friends, Rosita has a resolute work ethic and determined optimism that wavers a bit thinking about the severity of the situation her neighbors and friends are facing.

“Some of them have to live up to five people in one studio apartment. There just isn’t money to make it,” she shrugs. “Food like this helps make ends meet, and it is good food too.”

In spite of the relief provided by rent control and subsidized senior housing, 79 percent of elderly renters living alone in San Francisco are unable to make ends meet. This trend will certainly continue as seniors may have previously gotten food from the Food Bank, which had to cut 440 seniors from their rolls in September, or other food programs, run out of resources. The California Department on Aging has cut $110,000 from Project Open Hand’s senior program which resulted in the closing of four senior sites. These cuts, coupled with other reductions in services, leave more seniors without critical supplemental services. Among the population St. Anthony Foundation serves these cuts leave people needing more than supplements; they need to find complete substitutions.

In the Dining Room and Social Work Center need for services began to escalate immediately as the economy began to decline. The Dining Room witnessed a 10 percent increase in number of families coming in for lunch. The Emergency Food Assistance Program, a service which we created to provide a reserve in unforeseen situations, has become a staple for our guests as other agencies’ food programs are chiseled down.

Since February our Social Work Center has seen a spike in clients signing up for Emergency Food Boxes, a program designed to assist Tenderloin residents who have medical dietary needs, or children under age 18. This program has been swamped with people from outside the neighborhood who need help but are ineligible because they live outside the Tenderloin. People who do qualify for the program are asking to receive food more. The meats and high quality food in these bags are expensive, usually donated, and hard to come by, so the staff are maintaining the duration of time between food boxes to aim for nutritional sustainability over time.

St. Anthony Foundation will continue to find ways to innovate, pool resources and ensure stability for our already borderline guests, as we have through seven recessions. We have implemented program assessments and adjustments, acute resource management, and collaboration with other organizations as critical strategies for adapting to the current economic climate. We are renegotiating pricing with our vendors, while purchasing cooperatively with other agencies for better pricing. In six months time, as severance and unemployment run out for the recently unemployed, we will indeed see new faces in the Dining Room, and in all of our programs. So we prepare, and look to our community partners and supporters to help through the upcoming hard times.

St. Anthony Dining Room and Social Work Center
Food for Thought (and Survival)

Collaboration, Connection, Community in Times of Crisis

In 1995, Notre Dame de Namur University began a “community engagement” program in the Tenderloin. Starting with volunteer activities and service learning days, the program has evolved into a number of classes, immersions, events, and more. With the dual purpose of learning from and serving the community, collaborative relationships have been established between schools and community organizations like St. Anthony’s for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in service of the public good. These programs have become even more important, both to fill the service gaps created by the increased numbers of those turning to St. Anthony’s, as well as for the edification of students grappling with the complexities of poverty in today’s rapidly shifting economic landscape.

For NDNU, this has been a powerful learning experience. Students serving in the dining hall at St. Anthony’s have transformative experiences. They come to know, in a way that traditional education cannot teach, our common humanity. And over the years, nearly sixty Tenderloin residents, politicians, service providers and service recipients have become “street teachers” for our various classes.

Any supporter of St. Anthony’s, or anyone who reaches out to those in need, can learn this lesson of mutual benefit. Our lives are enriched by a simple concern for the poor, be that on the streets of the Tenderloin or through other forms of support. Community engagement, collaboration, and support can be a significant force in changing lives and social landscapes. Being cognizant of how people, working together, can enrich their own lives while improving the lives of others is the most powerful experience of all.