Meals to Go (Continued from page 64)

and politics. Those dynamics are at work in the U.S., too.

When my college classmates and I graduated in the 1970s, the richest 1% in the U.S. had 9% of the nation's income. By 2007, the richest 1% took home almost 25% of U.S. income. This growing inequality is shrinking opportunity and wasting human capital.

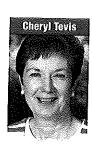
That's why a majority of Americans didn't receive a Nieman Marcus Christmas catalog. We can't afford to buy a \$75,000 yurt or a \$250,000 handcrafted mahogany speedboat and donate the proceeds to charity.

In fact, surveys of charitable giving show that America's poor donate more, in percentage terms, than higher-income groups. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the poorest one fifth of U.S. households gave an average of 4.3% of their incomes to charity in 2007. The richest one fifth gave 2.1%.

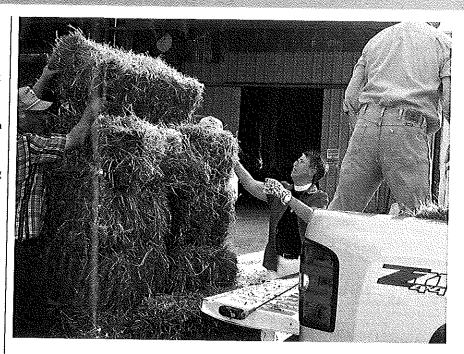
As we prepare our hearts for Christmas this year, I'm troubled by a lack of empathy in our society. In its place is a smug attitude that a comfortable status in life is entirely due to superior intelligence, good judgment, and hard work. What about luck, timing, and good health? Many seem to believe they built the log cabin they grew up in. Every one of us has benefitted from a helping hand. We're all part of a larger community.

Recently my Sunday School kids collected canned food for the local food pantry. My local 4-H club spent a shift at Meals From The Heartland with 750 other volunteers packaging 194,400 meals; most were shipped overseas but thousands went to Iowa food banks.

I hope these experiences will ingrain



the values of empathy and compassion in our children as practiced by the greatest teacher of all. Let's be generous with our gifts – large and small – now and throughout the coming year. •



Heaven-Sent Hay

Farmers in the Widwest reach out a helping hand to drought-stricken farmers and ranchers.

eon Thane, a San Angelo, Texas, rancher, along with other northern Texas ranchers, had no hay crop this year due to intense heat and drought. What the heat didn't destroy, wildfires did.

Farmers in the Northeastern Iowa Synod, ELCA, near Garanvillo and Luana, had a beautiful hay crop this year.

By mid-November, about 29 lowa truckloads of hay had been donated, delivered, and distributed by lowa, Wisconsin, and Missouri farmers to four Texas Lutheran churches, thanks to a hay-lift initiative.

It began in August when Pastor Harold McMillin of St. John Lutheran Church in Luana, lowa, attended a national Evangelical Lutheran Church in America assembly and heard of the hardships suffered by farmers and ranchers in Texas. On the following Sunday, he told his congregation of the need and suggested a hay lift.

By the end of August, the first truckloads left lowa, headed for hungry cattle herds in Texas. Volunteers offered to drive the trucks, help load and unload, and contribute toward the cost of transporting the hay. Lutheran Disaster Response also gave its support.

Initially, trucking was the biggest hurdle, McMillin says. One truck driver, a contractor, heard about the hay lift. He did not have work scheduled for that week, so he volunteered. He says, "My daddy always taught me not to sit around like a bump on a log, but to make myself useful."

Soon Western Express Trucking, based in Nashville, Tennessee, stepped forward to take over the trucking. Farmers across lowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin also came forward with donated hay.

Thane and other Texas producers, were grateful for the help. "Texas has had a handful this year as a result of fire and drought," he wrote in a letter of thanks to the Midwestern farmers. "This has been a new experience for many of us here. It is heartwarming to see man at his best, stepping up to the plate to help others. I hope we all learn from your example and readily help others with the same energy you all showed in coming to our aid!"

Forty Texas farmers received hay. Pastor Diane Eggemeyer, Calvary Lutheran Church, San Angelo, helped coordinate efforts.

Drought-stricken farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma also received donated hay from Wisconsin and Minnesota farmers through a partnership between Farm Aid and the Teamsters. To find out more on how to make a donation, call 800-FARMAID or visit www. farmaid.org. •