

Small town

Continued from Page 4
provided by the committee "also helps us to make sure that people get what they really need," he added.

St. Mary's is the largest church group involved in the project. Of the 200 cases, St. Mary parishioners are responsible for providing food for 47 — 26 families and 21 elderly people or shut-ins. The local American Legion supplies toys for 10 of the families on the St. Mary list; the parish furnishes presents and toys for 16.

At St. Mary's, Project Christmas has become an important part of the parish's overall social-ministry program, according to the pastor, Father Andrew W. Teuschel. "It gives the parish an outlet for its need to serve others," he noted.

The parish confirmation program, for example, uses the project as one of the options for service projects. At the parish school, each class collects food and money for a needy person whom they identify by his or her first name. Knowing the person's name helps to make the person real to the children, according to the school's interim principal, Katherine Bacon.

Project Christmas also provides the parish social ministry committee with a built-in system to help local people, Father Teuschel added. The committee, he explained, keeps the names of the people helped on record, and had "developed a continuous relationship with some of the people" from previous years.

Parish efforts are tied in with a community-wide program called CUES — Churches United for Emergency Services. Local churches work together through this program to provide a variety of services year round. Father Teuschel noted that both Project Christmas and CUES are examples of the "Ecumenical spirit that helps tie the (Dansville) community together."

The Rev. Bender agreed. "One of the unique things about Dansville is the spirit of ecumenism," he noted. "Project Christmas is a manifestation of that spirit."

The minister also pointed out another value of the project. "Dansville is kind of a comfortable community," he said. Project Christmas enables people "to learn of the need here in Dansville. Working with the project, you see people's surprise learning the depth of that need."



Michael Necedet Aydogan

In its fifth year, Dansville's Project Christmas manifests a small-town spirit of ecumenism.

George Bacon is one person who has seen poverty in Dansville first hand. He has delivered packages for three years now and acknowledged that he's been amazed by the depth of the poverty he's seen. "Some of the homes — I couldn't believe people were living in them," he exclaimed. "I think everybody should be made to do this so they can just see how some people have to live," Bacon added.

Bill Rowan, who has been involved with Christmas-basket projects both through the parish and the American Legion for seven or

eight years, recalled one incident that particularly touched him. "Three years ago, one guy was totally awed by (what I'd brought)," he said. "He asked me, 'Where did this come from?' I just said 'Santa Claus' and left." The man continued to stand staring as Rowan drove away. "He couldn't believe it," Rowan added.

Mrs. John Kelly, summed up her reasons for being involved with Project Christmas quite simply. "You want to do everything you can to make Christmas merrier for someone," she said. "Isn't that what it's all about?"

Rome

Continued from Page 17

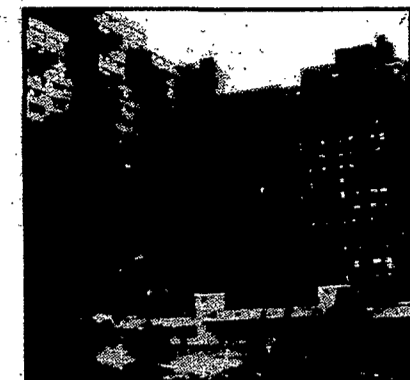
standing in his crib, he receives visits over Christmastime from a steady trickle of children, who recite poems from an opposite pulpit. Nearby is a stack of letters addressed to "Santo Bambino" from all over Italy.

One of Rome's most unusual fashion parades occurs here, too, when local gypsy families arrive for midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Proud women and children are delivered to the foot of the steps in the clan's polished Mercedes, their begging rags replaced tonight by their best dresses and jewelry.

About a mile away, near the Colosseum, Irish Dominicans sing beatitudes during Mass in the Church of San Clemente. Next to the main post office, at the English national church of San Silvestro, Pallottine priests lead a round of Christmas carols. And at the Vatican, the pope gears up for his marathon midnight liturgy.

By the time the spotlights go out in St. Peter's, most Romans are already home drinking a bubbling glass of spumante as the festive cap to a long day. The pope turns in immediately to rest for his busy schedule on Christmas Day. But if he sneaks a bite of pastry first — perhaps a piece of "sernic krakowski," the Polish specialty made from soft whey cheese — his Roman neighbors across the river would completely understand.

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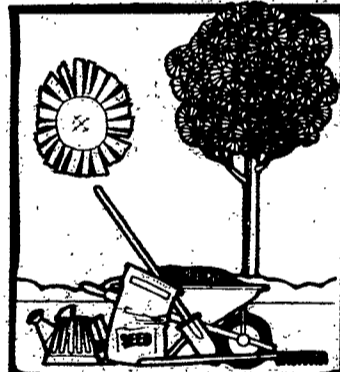
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