

Shy woman's efforts herald hope for needy

By Rob Cullivan

In the Gospel of St. Luke, Christ's birth is heralded by angels to shepherds tending their flocks. Some of those heavenly messengers have found their way to the town of Dansville in Livingston County, and their advance publicity is being handled by a shy, unassuming woman named Fran Lowery.

Lowery is chairwoman of the social ministry committee at St. Mary Church. An arts and crafts enthusiast, she promoted the idea of using Christmas tree ornaments designed as angels to attract potential donors to Project Christmas. A community-wide effort that involves several Christian churches in Dansville, Project Christmas distributes food baskets and presents to needy families in the area.

This year, Lowery wanted her fellow parishioners to take home a reminder of each person who had been asked to receive a gift. Each angel bears an individual's name and represents one gift. One child can receive up to three presents, and each adult can receive one. After Sunday Masses this month, parishioners chose angels, using the name to help them buy a gift, which they later placed under the parish's Christmas tree.

The project almost overwhelmed committee members, who Lowery said prayed for angelic assistance in creating their earthly counterparts. This year, 28 children and 11 adults will receive gifts from the parish. Whether they'll know it or not, are all beneficiaries of Lowery's Gospel-inspired enthusiasm to serve others.

Christ's teaching that His followers serve Him by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked is the basis of Lowery's commitment to social ministry. A member of the parish committee for the last three years, Lowery remarked that "I just felt that the Lord wanted me there."

The Lord is a vital part of Lowery's life. She said that she prays constantly, but when her co-workers on the social ministry committee praise her spirituality, she becomes red-faced with embarrassment. "I'm a very private person," she commented. Her privacy can't hide her dedication from those who work with her on the committee, though. "She's a very spirit-filled person," Mary Ann McGavisk said. "She's really done a lot." Committee member Margaret Knopf echoed those sentiments. "She'd

do anything for anybody. She goes out of her way to find these people who need her help," Knopf said.

When it comes to the people she wants to help, Lowery is an equal-opportunity giver. "You just can't love one and focus on one. I think they're all important." Among those she considers important are the homeless in her area. Her committee plans to embark on a series of study sessions next month dealing with the economic reasons behind homelessness. Sister Betty Hughes, a part-time staff member of the parish who is working with the committee, said the study sessions will be based on the U.S.

bishops' pastorals addressing economic issues.

Prior to delving into social ministry, Lowery was quite concerned with the importance of study — that of her three boys, that is. When her sons were attending the parish school in the early 1980s, Lowery was active in St. Mary's home/school association, and directed fundraising drives two consecutive years, raising more than \$5,000 each for the school. In the drives, students' families sold Christmas kits containing candles, cards, ornaments and lights. Ann Kenna, a member of the social ministry committee, cited Lowery's management of the drive as the key to its success, but Lowery is not one to

take credit for what she does, Kenna said.

Lowery will take credit for the numerous handicrafts and paintings in her home. She said that she loves Christmas, and her colorfully decorated tree attests to the care she lavishes on creating a festive atmosphere with the handiwork of her family and herself.

Lowery has one ultimate goal — to not get lost in a crowd. That may seem surprising given her unobtrusive manner, but the crowd she is thinking of is the one that rejects Christ's call to love one another and the crowd He refers to as the goats of the Last Judgment. "I don't want to be a goat," she said smiling.



Members of the social ministry committee of St. Mary Church in Dansville — (left to right) Mary Ann McGavisk, chairwoman Fran Lowery, Sister Betty Hughes and Janet Moore — gathered to discuss future ideas for their Project Christmas program, which involved the distribution of food baskets and presents to needy families in the area.

Linda Dow Hayes, Courier-Journal

Candy sale challenges fifth-grader to excellence

By Teresa A. Parsons

Andrew Thomas is no ordinary fifth-grader.

During the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, as other 10-year-olds pored through newspaper inserts from local toy stores, compiling lists of what they wished they could buy, Andrew was driven by what he wanted to sell.

Three hours a night, five days a week for more than a month, he prowled the parking lots and lobbies of local grocery and department stores, hospitals, libraries and just about anywhere else he could find passing people willing to buy his candy.

About the only way he didn't sell candy was the traditional way — door-to-door — because he was "kinda scared that someone would open the door and snatch me.

"Some people bought because they saw me out hustling in the cold. Some people gave stupid excuses, like 'I'm not from around here.' What does that have to do with anything?" he demanded with a flash of impatience. "But we were all very courteous and polite, and I think people liked us."

Once in awhile, he got lucky, as with the woman who bought three tins of "katyids" at \$4.50 apiece. But for the most part, the money came in \$1 at a time. And when the candy sale was over earlier this month, Andrew's dollars added up to "one thousand, eight hundred and something."

Andrew didn't get to keep that money. Nor did Corpus Christi School, for which the candy sale was a fundraiser. In the tough world of candy-sale economics, Corpus Christi's students had to sell more than \$20,000 worth of candy to make perhaps \$8,500 — the final tally isn't in yet.

Nevertheless, \$8,500 is a lot of money for a small, struggling school like Corpus Christi. And the \$1,800-plus Andrew made in his third consecutive year as Corpus Christi's top-seller is an all-time school record.

Since he exceeded the rest of the school's sales corps this year by nearly \$800, Andrew can afford to be cavalier about his exact total. But he is quick to point out that second-place

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Andrew Thomas, a fifth-grader at Corpus Christi School, sold more than \$1800 worth of candy during the school's fundraising campaign. This is the third consecutive year that Andrew has been the school's top salesman.

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