

Words of the prophet evoke desire for union with the coming Lord

By Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ
Diocesan Liturgical Commission

Advent ushers in for us the beginning of a new church year. This is a moment of new beginnings, bringing all the experiences that we have had to enliven this newness.

The church appropriately begins her year with this season of Advent, rich in prophesy and



story, tracing God's love and desire for creation. We enter into the story of the prophets, who offer us hope and call us to be in touch with God's initiative.

As Isaiah's words manifest, God's initiative is compelling; it is evocative. His message to us is full of images that — actively received in our hearts — bring God's dream to life in our time. He says,

"The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song" (verse 35).

"... they shall beat their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning

hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another nor shall they train for war again" (verse 2).

"I am the Lord, your God who grasps your right hand; It is I who say 'Fear not, I will help you'" (verse 41).

Is the desire for God — for union with God — stirred in our heart at the prophets words? These words are God's dream for our world. God's desires, God's dream is for us to live in love, to build community, to heal the broken, to reconcile ourselves with one another. This desire of God is ever present within each of us. All of creation is impregnated with the self-gift of

God. It is this self-gift that once again we ponder in the silence and waiting of Advent. Constantly our God comes to us.

Liturgically, Advent challenges us to stretch ourselves and find hope in the prophesies the church offers us; to find in them the means of preparing ourselves to root out with God's grace the areas of our lives that keep us from completely receiving God's self-gift to us.

"Come Lord Jesus," is the prayer of longing and anticipation. This season is filled with the joy of God with us — with us in all things and all ways.

CATHOLIC COURIER SOCIAL MINISTRY Christmas APPEAL

This marks the 22nd year of the Catholic Courier-Social Ministry Christmas Appeal. In the 1990-91 appeal, 1,349 donors contributed a total of \$64,576. Monies from the appeal were used to assist about 18,000 individuals — including 12,000 children — from 6,200 families.

Gifts to the Christmas Appeal assist individuals with expenses that generally are not covered by insurances or social-service programs. Among the needs funded by the appeal are special holiday meals, emergency home repairs and transportation.

Appeal funds are distributed by the Catholic Family Center, the Southern Tier and Finger Lakes Offices of Social Ministry, Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, and related agencies.

Mona is a widow who cares for her elderly mother and two young sons. They have never had hot water in their rural home. Mona's meager earnings make it impossible to save enough money for a hot-water tank and plumbing.

At the age of 94, Mr. G. lives alone with no family in the area. He recently had a hip replacement and is managing with help from a home health aide. His doctor recently suggested a "lift chair," but Medicare only pays a small portion of the cost of these expensive chairs. Mr. G's fixed income cannot absorb the added expense.

Pregnant, Mrs. A fled Mexico and an abusive partner to find a better life for herself and her unborn child in Rochester. She now is married to a loving man, but immigration problems have drained their small savings. Her husband's earnings of \$600 a month barely pay the rent and bills. They have asked for help with food and transportation expenses until their bills are paid.

Mr. and Mrs. K are an elderly couple, living in a three-room apartment. Mr. K. is in an advanced stage of Alzheimer's Disease. Mrs. K must care for him 24 hours a day. Her husband does not sleep at night and wanders, so she can't get any sleep. One day of respite care each week would greatly relieve Mrs. K, but this expense is beyond the reach of the couple's fixed income.

Recently widowed, Mrs. M is trying to support seven children on her own. Her husband left no life insurance and no savings. Mrs. M has applied for public assistance, but has

not yet received a check. She has been unable to pay the rent and has received an eviction notice. To feed her family, she has been going to a food cupboard each week.

Tracy is a single mother of a 9-year-old son. He lives out of state because Tracy sold and used intravenous drugs for several years. Through her drug use, she contracted the HIV virus, and is now dying of AIDS. She has asked for a train ticket so she can spend her last Christmas with her son.

Mr. O is an 87-year-old man who lives alone. He has a heart condition and needs to take several expensive medications each day. He has a very limited income and occasionally runs out of money before the end of the month. Mr. O also is hearing impaired. He needs help to stock his cupboard and pay for a hearing aid.

Mark and his girlfriend, Adriana, had a baby in August. Mark is only 19 and has few job skills. He does odd jobs to support his family, but often needs help to pay for baby formula. He wants to learn a trade, but right now needs to keep working to keep his family housed and fed. Mark's child needs a winter coat, clothing and a crib.

The Smiths and their four children met with misfortune in 1990 when a sudden illness left Mr. Smith unable to use his arms and legs. To avoid mortgage foreclosure on their house the Smiths have used up all their savings. The family needs regular help with medical and utility bills, and buying food.

Mrs. Jones, 34, and her four children have been on their own since her husband went to jail. Mrs. Jones works full-time in the evenings and part-time on weekends. Even the 14-year-old daughter works to help pay for the family's needs. They have no extra funds for unusual expenses. A holiday dinner on their table and a few gifts would put some hope back into their lives.

A 75-year-old widow, Mrs. L. has only a 12-year-old dog for companionship. She has a sister who resides in a nursing home some distance away, but most of her relatives — including her daughter — have all died. Because of her limited income, Mrs. L cannot afford to visit her sister for Christmas.

Injuries from a mugging left Mr. F. paralyzed on his left side. Since the incident, his marriage fell apart and he had to sell many possessions. Although he is now on public assistance, he worries more about his three daughters than his own well-being. He goes without meals to give his ex-wife money for the children. He has lost 30 pounds in the last four months. A food voucher would allow him to follow a healthier diet.

Louise is 28 years old, has three children and also cares for her 10-month-old grandchild. She is on public assistance, and sometimes doesn't have enough money for food. The children need shoes and clothes.

Mary, who is 80, allowed her granddaughter to move in with her, along with the granddaughter's boyfriend. They did nothing to help Mary, and they also vandalized the inside of her home. Mary finally managed to get them to move out. Now, however, she is alone in Rochester and needs help to restore her home as well as her trust and faith.

Gabrielle is a single mother struggling to raise three children on her own. A series of misfortunes forced her to sell most of her belongings and move in with her elderly, disabled parents. Their home has very poor plumbing and inadequate heating. Gabrielle has a

wealth of determination, but needs help to feed and clothe her children.

Painful and crippling arthritis has forced Mrs. K, a 77-year-old widow, to give up her volunteer activities. She had been a dedicated and enthusiastic participant in her church's jail-ministry program. Now she says she is "a prisoner in her own apartment." Her fixed income does not allow for such luxuries as a wheelchair.

Following a long fight with drugs, Barbara is trying to meet the needs of her daughters, ages 11 and 7, and her 6-month-old son. Circumstances will force the family to move to another apartment in December, and Barbara is using all her savings for the move. She has no money to buy winter clothes for the children and herself. She also wishes she could put a few toys under the Christmas tree.

An older couple with four children came to the United States in April, 1990, from Southeast Asia. The mother died recently after a long illness. The father has also been ill with high blood pressure and heart problems. They can't afford medications that aren't covered by insurance.

When Mr. P. lost his job two years ago and couldn't find another, he started his own freelance graphic-arts business. He is talented, but still has trouble finding enough assignments to support his wife and eight children. The older teenagers have part-time jobs to help meet expenses. New shoes rather than hand-me-downs for the youngest would brighten the family's holiday and their outlook on the future.

Kate is a single mother of five who has turned her life around. Due to neglect and Kate's drug use, the children were placed in foster homes two years ago. During that time, she completed a treatment program and remains sober today. Kate got her children back this spring and is maintaining a stable home for them. She would like to make this first Christmas back together a special one for her family.

I want to help the needy of the Diocese of Rochester. Here is my contribution to the 1991 Appeal.

MAIL TO:
Christmas Appeal, Diocese of Rochester
1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____

PLEASE SEND CHECK ONLY