

# Relief effort advocates alms and awareness

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

Empty soda-pop cans, plastic "love loaves" and laundry baskets are among the "props" parishes will use for this year's Operation Breadbox, the Diocese of Rochester's annual Lenten program of almsgiving, education and prayer.

According to Judy Taylor, diocesan coordinator of the project, 60 to 90 parishes and organizations take part in the voluntary effort each year.

In 1991 alone, diocesan contributions to Operation Breadbox totaled more than \$58,800.

Of that money, 75 percent was sent to Catholic Relief Services for international projects, and 25 percent was designated for local efforts at hunger relief.

The Diocese of Rochester began Operation Breadbox approximately 20 years ago, Taylor said. Its focus is supporting development programs that address problems in Third World countries — rather than just giving alms to the needy in those nations.

Previously, Operation Breadbox coordinators selected three international projects for support each year. This year, however, Operation Breadbox will support seven projects to give parishes more choices, Taylor said.

The efforts to be supported through Operation Breadbox this year are: a reforestation project in Senegal; a women's rehabilitation project in Nepal; human-rights programs in Guatemala; social-justice and education programs operated by the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph in Chile and Brazil; rehabilitation projects in storm-ravaged Bangladesh; and a coffee cooperative in Tabasco, Mexico.

The money for local efforts is sent back to the region from which it was collected. Regional committees divide the money among a variety of local projects — including food pantries and soup kitchens — Taylor explained.

The aim of Operation Breadbox is not just almsgiving, Taylor observed. Parishes often include bulletin inserts, announcements and talks to help educate parishioners about the projects being supported and the goals of the Operation Breadbox.

Many parishes distribute small paper bags to be placed at the center of parishioners' dinner tables to remind family members of the effort and to prompt discussion, Taylor said. Some parishes encourage people to use chipped bowls, baskets or their own



File photo

A little boy suffering from severe diarrhea received liquid from U.S. Dr. Jim Nelson May 20, 1991, in Kutubdia Island, Bangladesh.

paper bags instead of ones supplied by the parish.

Participants place contributions in these containers throughout Lent, then bring them to church to be pooled with other parishioners' donations.

Some parishes come up with innovative ways to bring home the message of Operation Breadbox.

At St. Patrick's in Victor, for example, pastor Father George Wiant introduced "love loaves."

The hollow, plastic loaves were developed by World Vision, a program of the World Council of Churches, Father Wiant explained.

Father Wiant obtained World Vision's permission to use the loaves for Operation Breadbox during his pastorate of the Northern Cayuga Cluster, and he brought the idea with him when he became pastor of St. Patrick's.

Father Wiant said the loaves are used instead of bags or bowls on the table. "It's a very effective logo, because it's a reminder every time people sit at the table," he noted.

In addition to the loaves, St.

Patrick's also gave parishioners 199 laundry baskets to be filled with items for which food stamps cannot be used. Such items as deodorant and soap will be collected in the baskets, for later distribution to a local food pantry, Father Wiant said.

St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Elmira Heights is using envelopes to help collect money. Each week, an envelope listing the designated project for that week is included with the bulletin.

The parish also operates a "Feed a Family" project in conjunction with Operation Breadbox. Parishioners are asked to collect food items at home and bring them to the church on Palm Sunday. The items will be distributed among the needy in the Elmira area.

At Auburn's Sacred Heart Church, parishioners have developed a unique way for parish youths to take part in Operation Breadbox.

Students in the CCD program are collecting empty soda-pop cans and bringing them to their Sunday classes. The deposit refunds from the cans will be added to the monies collected by the parish for Operation Breadbox.

The can collection "adds a twist of excitement," noted Vincent DeWitt, the parish's Christian education coordinator. "It gives (the youths) something to collect they can visually see."

Last year, children in the religious education program collected pennies, DeWitt noted, reporting that more than 60,000 pennies were raised in the effort.

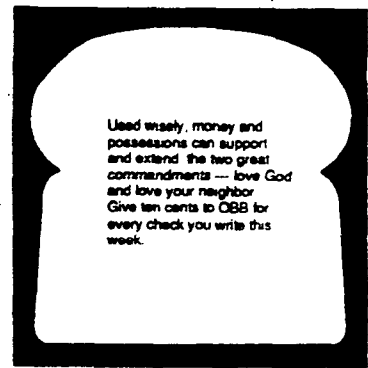
DeWitt begins the Sunday school program with an assembly of all the students. Before collecting the cans, he explains the nature and location of the project being supported that week.

Parishioners at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Rochester already know where their money is going. The parish has opted to support relief efforts in Russia — not one of the projects designated by Operation Breadbox.

On Ash Wednesday, paper bags bearing the phrase, "To Russia, with love," were distributed to parishioners, explained the parish's pastor, Father Robert Beligotti. The money collected will be sent directly to Catholic Relief Services for relief efforts in Russia, he noted.

Father Beligotti explained that the

## Operation Breadbox



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parish decided not to go with the six projects offered by Operation Breadbox "because none of the projects appealed to the people. We thought there would be more of an identification with Russia."

In choosing to support a project outside the Operation Breadbox list, St. Anthony's actually is following the lead of several other parishes in recent years, Taylor observed. The program provides for flexibility, she pointed out, suggesting that parishes' decision to select alternate projects is actually an indication of Operation Breadbox's success.

"Third-world awareness has been built up through years of Operation Breadbox," Taylor concluded. "Because (parishes) are more comfortable and knowledgeable, they are determining their own ministries to support."



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