

CATHOLIC COURIER SOCIAL MINISTRY
**Christmas
 A P P E A L**

Christmas Appeal begins 23rd year

This is a week of firsts: the first week of Advent; the first week of the Christmas Appeal campaign; and the first anniversary of the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter "Putting Children and Families First," a document that calls us to take note and take action to correct the "pattern of national neglect that seriously short-changes our children."

The "children's pastoral" presents disturbing statistics about children in the United States. Among those reported in the document:

■ Children are the poorest members of our society; one out of five children grows up poor in the richest nation on earth.

■ Almost a fourth of our children are growing up in single-parent families, most of them headed by women who are more likely to live in poverty.

■ Most poor children are white and from working families; the child poverty rate in rural America is higher than for the nation as a whole.

■ Mothers and children make up an increasing proportion of the homeless in this country.

■ The U.S. infant-mortality rate ranks our country last among 20 western nations. Sixty-seven newborn babies die each day in this country. Each year, 40,000 U.S. children do not live to see their first birthdays.

These facts and figures contrast sharply with the holiday stereotype of robust children in a happy family circle around a gift-laden tree. Moreover, these figures are not about children in some far corner of the world. They are our children — right here in the cities, villages and towns of this diocese.

They are the children of Steuben County, for instance, which ranks in the top third of New York counties with respect to children living in poverty. Yates County outranks all but two other New York state counties for having impoverished children.

"The number of poor children is high in all five of the counties we serve," notes Margaret Byrne, director of Catholic Charities for the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry. "Not only Yates, but also Ontario, Wayne, Seneca and Cayuga."

"The situation becomes dramatically evident when school is not in session," according to Byrne. "Then the children accompany their parents to our lunch program. Typically, the number of people served jumps over the holidays and the summer."

Approximately 22,000 people are expected to need help from the Christmas Appeal this year. More than 14,000 of them will be children. A few of their stories follow.

Danny, age 7, lives with his retired grandmother. Her fixed income is

A Calendar of Prayers

Sunday, November 29

Pray for the success of the Christmas Appeal. So many people in need are waiting for assistance.

Monday, November 30

Pray that the sick will be returned to health — and for those who cannot get the care they need.

Tuesday, December 1

Pray that pregnant teenagers will choose life.

Wednesday, December 2

On this 12th anniversary of the martyrdom of four American women missionaries in El Salvador, pray for those who await freedom from oppression.

Thursday, December 3

Pray that the resolve of individuals and families suffering with drug and alcohol abuse will be strengthened as they wait to enter treatment programs.

Friday, December 4

Pray for families in our community who wait for employment.

Saturday, December 5

Pray for children who are homeless and wait for shelter and food.

An Advent Meditation

We are on the way to you . . .
 From the villages and towns,
 from the hills and valleys,
 with suffering brothers and sisters,
 with laughing children,
 as builders of peace,
 as messengers of justice,
 as witnesses to your love,

as members of your Church . . .
 We are on the way to you
 when we support the weak,
 when we pray for the persecuted,
 we are on the way to you.
 When we celebrate your presence,
 you are with your people.
 — From a Latin American Hymn

meager and her health is poor. She tries to provide for the boy's needs, but right now her own expenses — mostly medical — are very high. Holiday foods and gifts are very unlikely without help.

Tina, Sammy and Rachel — ages 2, 3 and 4 — are almost like triplets. Their mom has her hands full, but is determined to raise them on her own and far away from an abusive father. She has found work with a temporary agency and manages to pay the bills for most necessities. But she has no reserve for such luxuries as telephone service. A phone in her home would make her more employable and would also keep her in touch with the babysitter. \$50 for the deposit would make a world of difference.

Shawna is a 9-year-old diabetic. Her mom is waiting to be "processed" for food stamps and other assistance that will help support her household. Shawna needs fresh food items and some special foods in her diet, but they are not available from the parish pantry and are too expensive for her mom to purchase. \$15 is their humble request.

Peter's and Angela's father died several years ago. On a very limited income, their mother did her best to raise them, but she is struggling with her own terminal illness. Now

teen-agers, Peter and Angela see many of their needs going unmet. Enough food for a second helping, shoes that never belonged to someone else and perhaps a gift for each of them are only possible with help from Christmas Appeal.

Tammy was born on the night of her 11-month-old sister's funeral. Her sister had been very ill from birth, and Tammy is not thriving. Her mother has asked for help in avoiding eviction. The last month has depleted her emotional, physical and financial reserves.

Jon, 14, and Nikki, 6, moved into the house of their widowed aunt following the tragic deaths of their parents. Though quarters are cramped, they have been warmly welcomed by their three young cousins who willingly share bedrooms. The aunt's income is spread thin, and Christmas dinner and gifts will be skimpy unless others share with this family.

Four-month old Stephanie, whose mom is barely out of her teens, would hardly notice if there are no gifts and goodies this Christmas. But her three older siblings will be all too aware of what they lack.

Kim is 14 years old and must work after school to help her family. She would like to spend time with her

friends, but her violent father is in jail and Kim's mother can't earn enough at minimum wage to support herself and four children even working a full time and a part-time job.

Patricia is 5 and was recently diagnosed as diabetic. Her single mother has applied for Medicaid, but Patricia needs treatment before the family will be approved for benefits. A gift of \$45 will give her a healthier Christmas.

There was never a lot of money, but since his young father died of a stroke, 9-year-old Elliott has known he would be wasting his time to ask for anything for Christmas. His father left no life insurance and no savings. His mother has applied for public assistance but has not yet received a check. To feed her son, she has been relying on the parish food cupboard. The family is grateful for the generous bags of groceries.

Kathy was in a foster home for two years because of her mother's alcohol abuse. She was recently reunited with her mom, who successfully completed a residential treatment program and is working hard to remain sober and make a stable home. This will be their first Christmas together. Holiday gifts and goodies will not be possible without the charity of others.

Kara lives with her grandmother in a mobile home that has no heat or hot water. The fuel and hot-water tanks need to be replaced. With a fixed income never meant to support a 7-year-old child, Kim's grandmother doesn't have any way to pay for repairs. A warm shower is an unusual request of Santa Claus, but not for the emergency assistance staff of the diocesan social ministry agencies.

Colin's 4-year old feet just keep growing. His single mom is unable to buy him new shoes as often as he needs them. She is trying to finish school so she can earn a better income. Day-care expense often uses up even the food money. Christmas Appeal funds have helped them through several tough months.

In her three short years, Maria's family has been forced to move several times. The most recent move was to escape lead-toxicity problems. Maria spent last Christmas in the hospital for treatment of critically high levels of lead in her blood. Each move has used up the reserve her mother managed to squeeze out of a meager income. This season finds Maria healthier, but with no prospect of a visit from Santa.

What is the Christmas Appeal?

It is a cooperative effort of the *Catholic Courier* and diocesan Social Ministry to raise funds that will help people in desperate financial crisis.

For 22 years, the appeal has enabled the Catholic community to help thousands of people in 12 counties to meet life's basic needs. Christmas Appeal funds have been there when no other sources of aid were available.

Who benefits from the appeal?

Funding from the Christmas Appeal helps individuals and families in a short-term crisis. These are people who have no financial resources and are either waiting or ineligible for assistance from

other sources.

They represent all ages, religions and races and include the physically and developmentally disabled.

How does it work?

The appeal consists of a series of articles in the *Catholic Courier* and direct-mail solicitation of prior donors.

Appeal proceeds are allocated to the emergency funds of the following diocesan agencies: Catholic Family Center, 23.33 percent; Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, 23.33 percent; Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, 23.33 percent; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, 23.33 percent; and diocesan Urban Ministries, 11 percent.

CATHOLIC COURIER SOCIAL MINISTRY
**Christmas
 A P P E A L**

I want to help. Please use my donation for a neighbor in need. Mail check (payable to "Christmas Appeal") and coupon to:

Christmas Appeal
 c/o Social Ministry of the Diocese of Rochester
 1150 Buffalo Road
 Rochester, N.Y. 14624

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____