

Appeal supplements assistance programs

Our Advent expectation passes over into bright fulfillment during Christmastime, which lasts through January 10, the Baptism of the Lord. Our joyful celebrations draw families closer. Some family members may travel great distances just to be together for these gatherings.

The days between Christmas and New Year's Day, especially, are a traditional time for open-door hospitality. We polish and decorate, and set out our best and most festive welcome for visitors.

But our hospitality doesn't come from inviting others to covet our wealth. We often swallow a dose of humility and allow others to share what little we have along with the worn carpeting, lumpy furniture, and even our less-than-perfect families.

Many of the donations sent to the annual *Catholic Courier*/Social Ministry Christmas Appeal are accompanied by notes that reflect true hospitality. A frequent sentiment expressed is, "I wish it could be more."

Some notes show that the gift is being shared from substance, not excess: "The enclosed donation is small, but ... my husband is in a nursing home and expenses have been high."

Other donors acknowledge the "privilege" of sharing with others: "God willing, we will be in such a position to help for many years."

A wonderful spiritual depth is also apparent: "May this gift ... make Our Lord's coming a little more real to someone."

Hospitality — sharing what we have, not only with family and friends, but also with strangers in need — makes us Jesus' disciples because we literally are people who have learned their values

Seeking durable solutions

It is vitally important for us to provide direct assistance to those in need. But such assistance is not enough. As followers of Christ, we are called to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and to make Christian love real and active. This call has taken very explicit shape over the last century in the social teaching of our church.

This year's Christmas Appeal series was launched with a focus on one particular pastoral, the U.S. Bishops' recent document "Putting Children and Families First," which revealed very sad realities about the condition of children in this country and throughout the world.

The pastoral letter issued a call to action on a campaign for children.

"Let us insist that the needs of our children, all children, but especially unborn children and poor children, take first place in the dialogue over the values and vision that ought to guide our nation," the

U.S. bishops wrote.

In our diocese last May, Bishop Matthew H. Clark invited parish participation in a national offering of letters to support the Every Fifth Child legislation. Local response was enthusiastic and, as a result of increased funding, more children and families will receive government assistance through such programs as Head Start and Job Corps.

Bishop Clark extended another invitation to our faith communities to pledge to pray, serve and exercise citizenship to enhance the life and dignity of all children and families, especially the poorest.

Most parishes will be distributing pledge of commitment cards at liturgies for the Feast of the Holy Family on December 26-27. All who sign pledge cards will receive follow-up mailings in January with action ideas and resources. Contact your parish social ministry committee for further information.

from him.

We give witness to our belief in the Incarnation when we treat our neighbors as family, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

For 23 years the Christmas Appeal has clearly testified that this community of faith recognizes Christ in the poor and vulnerable.

As in the past, the current appeal for donations has been met with generosity. At press time the number of donors and the total of donations — through far from totaled — was keeping pace with last year's appeal, which brought in more than \$71,000.

clude the appeal is not worth the effort.

But Christmas Appeal funds supplement such other sources of assistance as federal monies available to provide food assistance, the most common emergency need.

Government food programs provide only food and only a very limited variety. Moreover, such non-food items as those for personal hygiene (deodorant, shampoo, etc.), house-cleaning and paper products cannot be purchased with food stamps.

The families and individuals helped by the Christmas Appeal typically just don't have the cash to buy these basic supplies.

Private donations are needed for such items as well as for medical prescriptions. Even though insured, a single mother whose income barely meets necessities may find herself unable to purchase an antibiotic for a child's ear infection because she has not "spent down" the deductible. Without help, she would have to cut back on or go without some other necessity.

Through your support of the Christmas Appeal, the diocesan agencies of Social Ministry are able to help in such instances.

This is our final opportunity to ask you to donate to the Christmas Appeal — to share your blessings with the many in our community who turn to our Catholic human care agencies for compassionate assistance.

Please consider sending a donation — whether of \$5, \$15, \$50 or \$500. Whatever amount is within your means is needed and will be appreciated.

May your love and concern for those in need enrich your life at Christmas and throughout the new year.

The money contributed so far this year has already helped several thousand families through some crises.

In fact, over the holiday weeks, Christmas Appeal funds will allow the three offices of Social Ministry, about 128 urban parishes and the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation to provide food, medicine or shelter-related assistance to about 18,000 individuals from 6,200 families, including 12,000 children.

A calculator isn't necessary to figure out that the per-person use of Christmas Appeal funds is minuscule. With a surface glance you might con-

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 crises.

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 for them when no other sources of aid were available.

Who benefits from the appeal?

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

through 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 a direct-mail solicitation of prior donors.

Appeal proceeds are allocated to the emergency funds of the following diocesan agencies: Catholic Family Center, 26.33 percent; Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, 26.33 percent; Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, 26.33 percent; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, 10 percent; and diocesan Urban Services, 11 percent.

Christmas APPEAL

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

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c/o Social Ministry of the Diocese of Rochester
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Rochester, New York 14624

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