

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

Advent preparations should include those in need

By Judy Taylor
 Guest contributor

It can take enormous effort to muster the Advent spirit of "waiting in joyful hope." The church's calendar allows for this special time of preparation, but it is in direct contrast to commercial promotions that ignore Advent and rush us too soon into Christmas.

With this issue, we begin a series of daily reflections to enrich your prayerful observance of Advent, to help you savor rather than gulp down the season.

The daily reflections are accompanied by Christmas Appeal vignettes, brief illustrations of how your generosity can bring joyful hope to individuals and families in need.

It is anticipated that more than 23,000 people will seek emergency assistance from diocesan human-care agencies or parishes this year. Donations to the Christmas Appeal will ensure that no one in genuine need will be turned away.

A donation of any amount to the Christmas Appeal can make a real difference in someone's life. We hope this Advent series makes a real difference in your spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth.

Week One

Sunday, November 28:
 Advent is both a time to prepare us for Christmas, when Christ's first coming is remembered, and to direct our minds and hearts to awaiting Christ's second coming at the end of time.

Some antique Advent calendars clearly illustrated this dual focus. A depiction of an awesome Last Judgment wondrously turned — bit by bit, as the 24 tiny doors were opened — into a Nativity scene.

Bit by bit, as well, Christmas Appeal donations turn despair to hope and light darkened lives with loving generosity.

Jake's life was indeed dark. He had spent most of his childhood in foster homes. In his early adult years, his drinking binges and a belligerent personality earned him a bad reputation, a police record and a long history of institutional confinement. Though he had successfully reformed by 40, few people in his town would trust him with employment or friendship.

He first approached the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry (STOSM) for food assistance. His rent used up most of his Social Security income. He



could not even afford needs as basic as food and toilet paper.

Along with the groceries, Jake received hospitality and sincere caring from the Catholic community. STOSM staff learned of his interest and talent with crafts. A few dollars from the Christmas Appeal bought materials he needed to start a small-scale craft enterprise. He now has some additional income and a sense of self-worth from being able to meet his own needs.

Jake has become active in the formation of an organization for people involved in institutional services, and he is a very effective advocate for "consumer" involvement in services.

Monday, November 29:
 Dorothy Day was the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. She used her journalistic talents to affirm the value of all people regardless of their marketplace worth. She died on this date in 1980. As her funeral procession stopped at the church door, a disheveled and hollow-eyed fellow pushed his way through the crowd to bend over the coffin and peer intently. No one interfered, because all understood that it was in such as this man that Dorothy had seen the face of God.

Homelessness and mental illness keep many people from gainful employment. Christmas Appeal funds often are the only source of help for people such as John, a resident in a homeless shelter. He suffers from a mental illness that causes severe paranoia and hallucinations. When no other resources were available, Christmas Appeal donations allowed Catholic Family Center to provide the \$25.65 for medication to stabilize his condition.

Tuesday, November 30:
 Today is the feast day of Andrew the Apostle, brother of Peter and disciple of John the Baptist.

While we may recall the baptizer's warning, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" our modern society tends to let commercialism overpower the Advent call to conversion. One way to lift the holy day back into prominence is to remember those whose poverty or disability keeps them from the pleasures of holiday preparation.

Betty, an 18-year-old mother of two, needs your generosity to prepare any sort of holiday for her family. She has turned to the diocese's Livingston County Rural Outreach program for help. After leaving an abusive situation, she is barely able to manage day-to-day basics. She rents an old mobile home that needs many repairs. The landlord has threatened her with eviction if she reports him to code enforcement. Betty has been enrolled in nurse's aide training through BOCES. With compassionate assistance she has found hope for a better life for herself and her children.

Wednesday, December 1:
 Many holiday baked goods — fruitcake, rum balls, spice cookies — need to ripen a few weeks before being eaten. What an excellent model they provide of Advent waiting as well as a lesson for all those times in life when patience is required.

When you are stuck in a long cashier line while shopping for the ingredients for your holiday table, pass the time with a prayer for people like Marta and Jesus. They are migrant farm workers who traveled to the Finger Lakes area hoping to find employment. A wet spring lessened the demand for workers. With no jobs and no housing, they turned to the regional office of social ministry to help them through the 45-day wait for government assistance.

Thursday, December 2:
 On this date in 1980, four church women — Maura

Clarke, MM; Dorothy Kazel, OSU; Ita Ford, MM; and Jean Donovan — were assassinated in El Salvador because of their human-rights work among the poor. They were present among the people as members of our church, which identifies with the causes of the poor.

You can be present among the poor of the diocese by making a contribution to the Christmas Appeal. Catholic social ministry-agencies are often the only organizations that can help individuals like Olive. She is a 77-year-old childless widow who lived like a prisoner in her own apartment because of drug-related violence in her neighborhood. She asked Catholic Family Center for help. An apartment in a secure building was located, and Christmas Appeal funds provided the deposit her limited income could not spare.

Friday, December 3:
 Today is the feast day of St. Francis Xavier, one of the initial group who joined Ignatius Loyola to become Jesuits. Like John the Baptist for the people of Judea, Francis was a precursor of Christ for the people of Japan and India.

Bringing the "good news" to others through charity and service is a very real form of evangelization. Sometimes showing the love of Christ to someone in difficult circumstances has a relatively small price tag.

For example, \$20 from the Christmas Appeal provided a much-needed prescription for a middle-aged man who turned to the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry when he found himself between jobs again and uninsured.

Saturday, December 4:
 The name of the martyr Barbara, remembered today, means "barbarian" or "stranger." St. Barbara walks among us in anyone who is demeaned for being a stranger.

Christmas Appeal donations made one month's rent available to a newly arrived refugee family when bureaucratic red tape delayed the transfer of their personal funds and would have left them homeless.

Similarly, Catholic Family Center was able to respond immediately with a food voucher when staff learned that a resettled family was completely without groceries. Their original application for food stamps had been submitted four months earlier, but was not yet approved.

Taylor is education and advocacy communications manager for diocesan Social Ministry.

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 23 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 it?

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

awaiting or ineligible for assistance through other sources.

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.

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I want to help. Please use my donation to help a neighbor in need.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Mail check (payable to "Christmas Appeal") and this coupon to:

Christmas Appeal
 c/o Social Ministry of the Diocese of Rochester
 1150 Buffalo Road
 Rochester, New York 14624