

Celebrate with 'authentic spirit of sharing'

By Judy Taylor
 Guest contributor

Week Three

Sunday, Dec. 12 — In 1531 the Blessed Mother appeared to the Mexican Indian Juan Diego at Tepeyac, a hill northwest of Mexico City. She left him with an image of herself on his cloak. The image depicted Mary as an Indian woman wrapped in a cinto, the sash Indian women wore when they were pregnant, thus indicating that Mary is pregnant with Christ. Her message was the good news, "God is with you," and assurance that the cries of the poor and oppressed would be heard. Our Lady of Guadalupe is patroness of all the people of the Americas.

Doctors say Luz, an 18-month-old child, soon will need to have her pancreas removed, which will require her to take daily insulin shots. Luz also must go to the hospital quite often. Because her young mother cannot always afford bus fare, sometimes mother and child must walk to the facility. During the winter months this has become very difficult. Catholic Family Center will use Christmas Appeal funds to provide Luz and her mother with a bus pass.

Monday, Dec. 13 — St. Lucy, though often associated with Swedish Yule traditions, really came from Sicily. Her name means "light," and her feastday occurs in our darkest season. She is the patron saint for the "lights of the body" — the eyes. Throughout Christianity, her help is invoked against diseases of the eyes.

While staying in an crowded, overnight shelter, Natalie lost the eyeglasses she recently had purchased with assistance from Medicaid. The agency would not help again so quickly, but without her bifocals, Natalie could not start any kind of job. Thanks to \$25 in Christmas Appeal funds, when no other agency could help, Catholic Family Center was able to obtain new glasses for Natalie.

Tuesday, Dec. 14 — Between the 16th and 18th centuries, placing a candle in a window near a door became a very popular Christmas tradition in Ireland. The candles may have been intended as a symbol of welcome and refuge to the Holy Family, to be extended to friends and passersby as well.

After 17 years of marriage, Marva's



husband began transferring his physical abuse of his wife to his teenage daughter. Although Marva had endured the violence herself for the sake of her children, concern for her daughter gave Marva the courage to move out.

Her struggle to survive on her own was difficult. It became even harder when her husband began stalking the family and vandalizing their apartment and furnishings. Christmas Appeal funds provided Marva with refuge, by covering her expenses to move to a new apartment near friends who will watch out for the family's safety.

Wednesday, Dec. 15 — Pope John Paul II cautions: "We must not transform and debase Christmas into a festival of useless wastefulness, in a manifestation

of facile consumerism... It ought to be celebrated in an authentic spirit of sharing, of participating together with brothers and sisters who have need of our affectionate aid."

This "authentic spirit" of Christmas prevails year round at such urban parishes as Holy Apostles. There, staff and volunteers respond to the varied needs of about 80 individuals a week. A Christmas Appeal grant will help the parish provide food vouchers, bus tokens and personal items. Requests for blankets typically rise as the temperature falls, and people run out of fuel for room heaters.

Thursday, Dec. 16 — In Mexico, the Christmas celebration *La Posadas*, "the shelters," begins today. It is a novena of preparation for the feast of the Nativity. In symbolic procession, Mary and Joseph — the

"holy pilgrims" — move each night from house to house. Participants sing songs and recite prayers along the way, and prepare special foods to welcome them. Pilgrims carry lanterns to represent the stars that led the shepherds' way to the house of the birth. These days of Advent are the time to open the doors of our hearts to give shelter.

Tony and Anna are a couple in their early 20s with an infant daughter and a new baby on the way. The plumbing broke down in their rural mobile home, and they were left with no running water and unsanitary bathroom conditions. Tony had been out of work for several months, so they had no savings available for the repairs. Christmas Appeal funds allowed the couple to make their home livable again.

Friday, Dec. 17 — Special prayers are said each day of the final week of Advent, beginning at sunset today. The prayers — called the *O Antiphons* — express faith in the coming Redeemer.

Sue and Peter Huff are young parents of two beautiful toddlers, Jonah and Charles. Although Peter works full time, the family income is very low. They have no savings because they are still paying off maternity expenses not covered by their minimal health insurance. Recently they had to choose between paying the landlord and buying groceries. Christmas Appeal funds helped them through the crisis.

Saturday, Dec. 18 — Christmas tree sales peak this weekend. Most will be carried home and decorated on the same day. To keep the authentic Christian tradition, hold off lighting this symbol of Christmas until Christmas eve. Jesus Christ is the shining tree of life born from Jesse's root. When our Advent waiting is done, when life itself is completed, Christ will bring us home to paradise.

There will no doubt be shiny new bicycles under many Christmas trees this year. One young man received his a few months early, thanks to the Christmas Appeal. Brady works in a program for retarded adults. When he started showing up late for work, his caseworker investigated. She learned that Brady's rent had gone up and so he was using his transportation money to meet the increase. The Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry was able to help Brady purchase a bicycle with monies from the Christmas fund.

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.

CATHOLIC COURIER SOCIAL MINISTRY Christmas APPEAL

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