

Advent's final week focuses on family

By Judy Taylor
 Guest contributor

Week Four

Sunday, Dec. 19 — In Isaiah 11:1-3, the prophet speaks of "a shoot that shall spring from the stump of Jesse." Jesse, the father of King David, is one of Jesus' ancestors. The Jesse Tree is an Advent custom of decorating a tree with symbols of these ancestors. The symbols — such as an apple for Adam — are added gradually from the bottom up, finally topping off with Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The activity includes Scripture readings and reflection.

Family is a basic ingredient of our Christmas celebrations. Another Jesse had a difficult time arranging for his family to relocate and join him. His new job brought in steady income, but just not enough to send for his wife and children, and pay two rents. The family had been apart for six months. Christmas Appeal funds helped purchase the bus tickets to reunite the family.

Monday, Dec. 20 — According to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "When we handle the sick and the needy we touch the suffering body of Christ and this touch ... will make us forget the repugnance and natural tendencies in us. We need the eyes of deep faith to see Christ in the broken body and dirty clothes under which the most beautiful one among us hides."

John returned to Rochester to volunteer for experimental treatment for AIDS through Strong Memorial Hospital. He reconciled with his elderly mother, and she welcomed him back into her home and lovingly accepted the burden of his care. Her meager fixed income left many needs unmet. Other community agencies were able to assist with most, but only Christmas Appeal funds could provide the bus pass that would enable John to get to treatment sessions.

Tuesday, Dec. 21 — Today, the Winter Solstice, we will experience the least amount of daylight of the whole year. Holiday lights, glitter and candles may help "cheer" away the chilly darkness and gloom. A cheerful attitude can help, too. It isn't always easy, but one of the best ways to develop and maintain a reasonably happy view of life is to help those who are



troubled or in despair.

Marisol is in her mid-20s and struggling as a single parent of four young children. Although she receives public assistance, she rarely has any funds left at the end of the month for food or any of the items her growing children need. At one point, in desperation, she attempted to shoplift a winter coat for her oldest son. She was arrested, but later released by a compassionate judge who realized that Marisol deeply regretted the action, which was motivated by extreme need. Many like Marisol turn to diocesan agencies and parishes when they have nowhere else to turn. Your donation to the Christmas Appeal makes it possible for them to receive assistance and keep their dignity.

Wednesday, Dec. 22 — Social work is vitalized by the concept that service to individuals is given on the basis of kinship to God and to the recipient. Pray today

for all who serve in the field of social work.

The mother of 6-month-old Rachel could not afford the medicine prescribed for the sick child. She tried to help Rachel by giving the infant over-the-counter drugs, but this only made Rachel worse. When their plight was brought to the attention of the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry, Christmas Appeal funds helped Rachel along to a speedy recovery.

Thursday, Dec. 23 — To most of us, hospitality seems more of a social grace than a virtue. We like to invite our friends and relatives in and receive their compliments on our homes, our recipes, our qualities as hosts. But Christ is specific about our duties to strangers, and it is good from time to time to remind ourselves of the great value of kindnesses to those unknown to us, especially if they are in need.

A number of unfortunate circum-

stances plunged 60-year-old Wilfredo into homelessness. While other funds available in the community were restricted from covering transportation, Christmas Appeal monies paid his way to the Veterans' Hospital, where a bed, meals and companionship awaited him.

Friday, Dec. 24 — At sundown, Advent waiting is over and Christmas begins. Many families will exchange gifts tonight. "Remember the word of the Lord Jesus, he said: 'It is more blessed to give, rather than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

How fine we can feel when we have the opportunity to brighten the life of another; we can feel deeply grateful for the opportunity to show our goodwill and our sense of Christian charity.

At 96, Charles is in good health. But it is increasingly difficult for him to get up from a sitting position without assistance. Christmas Appeal funds were used to help him purchase a lift chair. He now speaks confidently of reaching the century mark in his own home!

Saturday, Dec. 25 — Medieval observance of Christmas included "wassailing," or "welcoming" ceremonies and songs. In one, called Wassailing with the Milly, a group of people circled the hall singing wassail songs and carols. They carried a large open box called the Milly Box. In the center of the box was a small statue of the Virgin and Child. As the singers passed from table to table, every guest was to give a gift to the "Milly," which means "my Lady." The present was a coin, a piece of fruit, or a more valuable gift such as a precious jewel. Later the gifts were distributed to the needy.

Sixty dollars in Christmas Appeal funds made it possible for a single mother on social services to renew a nursing license and find a good job.

The appeal enabled Randall, father of three young children, to get a haircut and a used suit for a job interview that ended many months of unemployment.

Funds from the Christmas Appeal enabled 76-year-old Mrs. Gelber to get a "One-to-One" communication box. The device for the hearing impaired helped end the loneliness and isolation of Mrs. Gelber, whose only son died in Vietnam.

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.

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