

DIOCESAN FEATURE

Catholic Courier + Catholic Charities

Christmas Appeal



Our Christmas Appeal series of Advent reflections continues ...

Week Three Making Rough Ways Smooth

The multitudes asked John the Baptizer, "What ought we to do?" (Luke 3:10). All walks of people asked him — from shepherds to government leaders. That's quite amazing when you consider the statistics that tell us more than 80 percent of churchgoers don't even remember what was said during the Sunday homily. The people not only listened to John's message and remembered it, but were also touched enough to ask what they needed to do to make the Word real in their lives!

The multitudes that heard John's voice in the wilderness may have represented the average person in first-century Palestine. These are the people today who we'd say pay their taxes, go to church and obey the law. Yet, even to these, John called for a reordering of their lives toward those in need.

We are also called to reach out.

The tax collectors represented the political system that oppressed the Jews, and they often found ways to benefit personally at the people's expense. When they asked John the Baptizer, "What are we to do?" he tells them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." The message for tax collectors and for us is clear — even when systems, structures

Diocesan Catholic Charities agencies provide more than a handout. Those in need receive compassionate assistance.

and forces seem beyond our ability to change, we can't allow ourselves to be part of the processes that hurt other human beings. Each of us can make rough ways smooth, to choose to do something over doing nothing.

As with the tradition of the earlier prophets, who spoke of God's concern for justice, John's answers to all who ask about ethical requirements focus on the questioner's treatment of others.

The Messiah for whom we are preparing is coming for the whole world's salvation, particularly the outcast, the lowly, the despised — those people society shuns.

Pray that our parishes will build true community with the poor, and challenge the values and social structures that contribute to poverty.

A family Advent activity:

Step outside into the cold winter night to see the stars. Find Polaris, the constant North Star. Mary and Joseph no doubt relied on reading the stars to safely and surely guide them on the difficult journey to Bethlehem. The Magi followed their guiding star across the Arabian desert to find the newborn king. Finding our way through the Christmas frenzy can be difficult, but it is not impossible.

Those without family need hope to live

Orphans

In today's society, "orphans" are not just motherless children. Among the unclaimed people are the mentally ill, the alcohol and drug addicted, and those living with or impacted by HIV/AIDS.

♦ Monte's alcoholism estranged him from his family many years ago. He was quite alone now in a home so littered and in need of repair that the local health department threatened to condemn the building. He moved into an unheated camper parked on the property because of the squalid conditions in his house. Monte's unkempt appearance and deafness compounded his isolation. Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation secured a repair grant, but workmen hesitated to enter the home because of the amount of refuse. The agency's professional staff went the extra mile

to reach out to Monte. He then voluntarily cleaned up the property so repairs could be made.

Christmas Appeal funds allowed the foundation to help Monte find a small stove and refrigerator. With the change in his surroundings, Monte's lifestyle changed, too. His rough ways were smoothed by the generosity of others.

♦ Lisa was a "throwaway child." She had lived on the streets since she was 9 years old. Drugs and prostitution found her. Now, at 25 and dying with AIDS, the government "provides" for her and her daughter. It is Catholic Charities AIDS Services staff, however, that "care" for them. And it is Christmas Appeal funds that will bring any merriment to their holidays.

♦ Twelve-year-old Jimmy is a child with AIDS. He has lost his mother to the disease and is separated from his older sister and brother who are liv-

ing with relatives in the Midwest. He is a modern orphan relying on this Catholic community for a sense of family. Christmas Appeal funds cannot buy him good health, but will be needed to bring some comfort in the days ahead.

♦ Edward was mentally troubled. When he periodically abandoned his family, Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier was able to tide them over with Christmas Appeal-funded necessities. Meanwhile, Edward would drift from one friend's house to another, but was never welcome long. The agency was called by one friend concerned that Edward might do something reckless. He had apparently gone off quite agitated and now was nowhere to be found. Agency staff notified authorities and also began a personal search. Like the Infant Jesus, Edward had found hospitality and warmth in a neighbor's barn.

What is the Christmas Appeal?

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

For 24 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 past and potential donors. Appeal proceeds are allocated to the emergency funds of the following diocesan agencies: Catholic Family Center, Finger Lakes Social Ministry, Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier, Catholic Charities Livingston County outreach, Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, and diocesan Urban Services.

Please use my donation to help a neighbor in need.

This gift is in honor/memory of (circle one):

Name: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Mail check (payable to "Christmas Appeal") and this coupon to: Christmas Appeal, c/o Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624

Look next week for the Catholic Courier's special Holiday issue!

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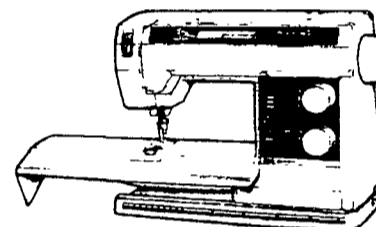
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