

# Christmas FEATURE

## Parishes' giving trees branch out to the needy

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Hundreds of diocesan residents this Advent enjoyed Christmas presents provided through the generosity of parishioners at three churches — St. Pius the Tenth in Chili, and St. Charles Borromeo and St. John the Evangelist in Greece.

All three parishes' social ministry committees erected Christmas trees in their churches. The trees were decorated with tags bearing the names — or, in some cases, identifying numbers — of needy individuals and families throughout the diocese, including some people who lived in the parishes themselves.

Each tag contained their wishes for a gift, ranging from a desire for a brand-new formal suit to a kid's dream of a toy truck.

Parishioners at all three churches then bought the gifts listed, and the parishes distributed them. The gifts went to a host of Catholic and non-Catholic agencies serving such groups as the elderly, the homeless, and unwed mothers.

Although many parishes also erect "giving trees" during Advent, these three parishes bought presents for, among others, low-income beneficiaries of Diocesan Catholic Charities.

"It's the people who wouldn't have anything from their families," said Lucy Dechaine, director of Catholic Charities' Community Services. "These gifts may be the only thing they receive for Christmas."

A combined total of more than 2,000 people benefited from the efforts at the

three churches, according to representatives from the three parishes' social ministry committees. The representatives stressed that the parishes initiated the efforts on their own, and that no agency solicited any of the churches for gifts.

"It's a great program, and we really enjoy doing it," commented Joan Nowak, who co-chairs St. Pius' social ministry committee with Sue Hosie. "It gives us a lot of satisfaction."

Nowak explained that the parish's schoolchildren made the tree tags, and that parish volunteers put names or numbers on them. The tags were then placed on the tree around Thanksgiving, she said.

St. John the Evangelist puts its own twist on the parish's tree decorations

by making them look like angels, according to Joyce Patridge, a member of the social ministry committee.

"It's beautiful," she said, adding that the parishes actually erect two trees. "This year we had over 900 angels."

One agency that benefited from the work of those angels was Catholic Charities' Community & Residential Services, on Ridge Road in Rochester. Ninety-six people with either developmental disabilities or HIV received gifts from the three parishes, said Dechaine and Heidi Donner, the agency's housing and transportation coordinator.

People who live with developmental disabilities or with HIV can receive a variety of services from Catholic Charities, including assistance with transportation, finances, health care and

housing, according to agency information booklets.

Donner and Dechaine pointed out that the people who received gifts from the parishes generally don't have the kind of money it takes to celebrate Christmas in an extravagant way.

"We didn't want anybody to go through Christmas without anything," Dechaine said.

Donner added that St. Charles Borromeo Parish also gave Catholic Charities several food baskets to distribute to the gift recipients. The caring evidenced by the parishioners' outpouring of presents was overwhelming, she observed.

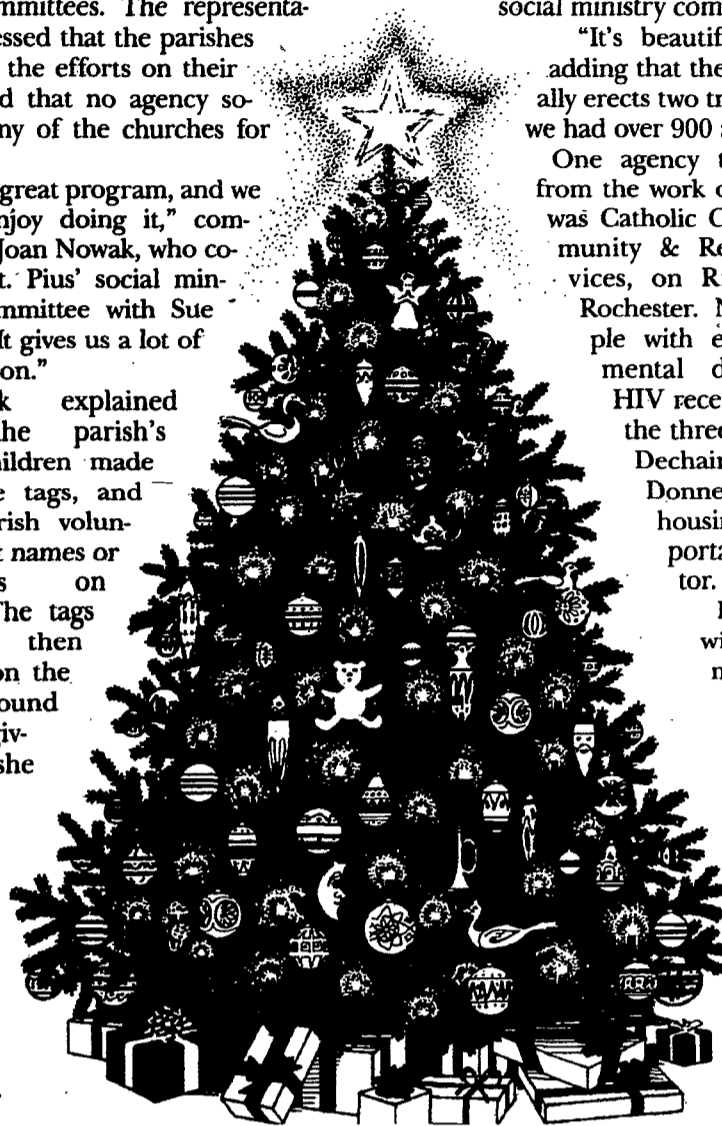
"There's no understating the generosity of these people," she said. "Some people got two, three gifts off of one tag."

That's no surprise to Kathy Termine, director of Catholic Charities' Residential Services, who also belongs to St. Charles' social ministry committee with her husband, Mike. She noted that her parishioners bought about 700 presents for the 400 tags on the parish's tree.

"I can always count on all those tags being gone," she said, noting that St. Charles' giving tree program is in its third year. Nowak echoed Termine's comments regarding St. Pius' tree.

"It's great to see that no one tag gets left on the tree," she concluded.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To learn more about Catholic Charities' Community & Residential Services, write the agency at 1945 E. Ridge Road, Suite 24, Rochester, N.Y. 14622, or call 716/339-9800; fax to 339-9377; or TTY 339-9806.



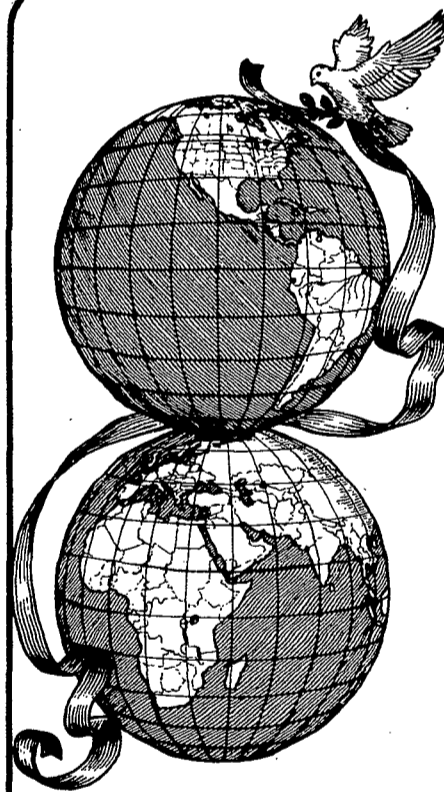
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