

FEATURE

Campaign offers year-round aid

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

A 30-year-old single mother on public assistance was given \$19.98 in *Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities* Christmas Appeal funds to pay for new shoes for her daughters, ages 5 and 9.

A 51-year-old woman on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) received \$15 from the appeal to help repair her eyeglasses.

A young single mother in the process of applying for the Woman, Infants and Children (WIC) program used a \$15 gift certificate from the appeal to purchase infant formula for her new son.

These three families all benefited from monies given to the 1995 appeal.

However, the aid to these particular families was provided between April and June, not at Christmas, as many people might assume. Appeal monies collected in the Christmas season benefit people year-round, observed Judy Taylor, education and advocacy communications manager for diocesan Catholic Charities.

"The need is not seasonal," noted Taylor, who has worked with the annual appeal for several years. "Although people tend to think and make time for charitable giving at the holidays, there are people in need year-round."

Indeed, since its inception in 1969, the appeal has provided more than \$1 million in emergency aid for thousands of people year-round. The money is distributed through Catholic Charities agencies, urban parishes and the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation.

The appeal was created specifically to

help people meet immediate needs not covered by other sources of assistance such as public assistance, unemployment, or insurance claims, or who were waiting to receive assistance from these other sources. Christmas Appeal monies have been put to such uses as paying rent or utility bills, purchasing boots or winter clothing, and repairing automobiles or homes.

"When a person's emergency needs are met, they then can concentrate on getting back on the road to self-reliance," Taylor observed.

But in recent years, donations to the Christmas Appeal, which receives no money from the Thanks Giving Appeal, have decreased from a high of more than \$81,000 in 1982 to approximately \$45,000 during the 1995 Christmas season. That decrease has meant less money available to help people — much to the consternation of the agencies called upon to provide this help, Taylor acknowledged.

"I know they have scrambled to find other sources of funding," Taylor said. People seeking aid have not necessarily been turned away, Taylor added, but they are only getting part of what they need.

"It's frustrating to the staff and to the client," Taylor said.

Part of the problem, Taylor noted, is that the appeal is competing with an increasing number of other efforts and agencies seeking contributions. People are having to spread their charitable dollars around.

"I don't think people are unwilling to give. They just have to be asked," Taylor remarked.

In light of this trend, a committee of *Catholic Courier* staff members began meeting even before the 1995 Christmas Appeal was completed. That committee looked at ways to increase people's awareness of the Christmas Appeal, and to consequently increase the number of people donating and the amount received.

The coincidence of publishing a July 25 edition of the *Catholic Courier* suggested to the committee an opportunity to print a "Christmas Appeal in July" to remind people that the appeal benefits the needy year-round.

In addition, the July 25 issue provides a way to announce some changes being made for the 1996 Christmas Appeal. Among those changes are:

- a new logo;
- a benefit dinner theater performance by the Aquinas Follies, (date and site still to be announced);
- a series of appeal-related bulletin articles to run during the holiday season.

Taylor noted that Catholic Charities officials are optimistic about the potential of these and other changes to increase the number of people donating to the appeal — and thus the amount of money available to help the needy in the diocese.

"We are all excited about the possibility of the emergency fund being sufficient to meet the demand being placed on it," Taylor said.



1996
Catholic Courier • Catholic Charities
Christmas Appeal

What is the Christmas Appeal ?

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

For the past 27 years, the appeal has enabled the Catholic community to help thousands of people in 12 counties to help 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 of 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 are 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; Finger Lakes Social Ministry; Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier; Catholic Charities Livingston County outreach; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation; and diocesan Urban Services.

Neediest Cases

Monies collected during the 1995 *Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities* Christmas Appeal continue to help people into the summer months. The following are some of the individuals and families aided with Christmas Appeal funds between just April and June.

- A single, 43-year-old woman laid off from her job in April and who subsequently became homeless received \$70 to pay for a short stay in a hotel while more permanent housing was being arranged through social services.
- A homeless couple moving to a new city to look for work was given \$29.60 for bus fare.

• A single mother with three young children who was in the process of moving from a battered-women's shelter used \$50 to purchase pots, pans and curtains for her new apartment after she learned that public assistance monies she received were not enough to cover basic start-up needs.

• A single mother with a new baby and whose public assistance benefits did not cover all their needs received \$97.72 to buy furniture for her new apartment.

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Sr. Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ and Dorothy Lindsay, Diocese of Rochester Women's Commission

The need is to help each other integrate spirituality into our lives. I welcome the opportunity to help people grow in recognition of their spirituality.

— Sr. Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ
Chair, Committee on Spirituality

Suggested resources on spirituality —

The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh

Peace is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh

Touching Peace by Thich Nhat Hanh

Women of the Word by Mary Lou Sleeve

Exploring the Feminine Face of God by Bridget Mary Meehan, SSC

for more information contact:

Borromeo Prayer Center • Mercy Prayer Center • Notre Dame Retreat Center • SSJ Spirituality Center

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