

Catholic Courier • Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal

Funds aid least fortunate

Continued from page 1

people who are coming in," Ciamprone said. "What I've noticed is calls are coming in from food pantries and other community agencies asking if we know where they can get help. Everybody is looking for resources — and they are not there."

"Definitely we're starting to feel the effects of welfare reform," noted Bobbi McGarrity, emergency services provider for the Catholic Family Center.

The increase in the number of people seeking aid is greater than normal this year — and the resources are not there to keep up with the demand, McGarrity acknowledged.

"It definitely hurts when people come in and the funds don't stretch," she said.

One resource that has been available to Smith, Ciamprone and McGarrity is the *Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities* Christmas Appeal. Since 1969 the appeal has provided emergency funds for diocesan agencies to help people who have no other immediate aid.

Often these people are waiting to get on public assistance, for their unemployment checks to begin to arrive, or to be enrolled on Medicaid, McGarrity observed. The waits can be 45 days or more, she added — but people's needs are often immediate.

"I use (Christmas Appeal monies) for everything that can't be covered somewhere else," acknowledged Sister Nancy O'Brien, RSM, coordinator of the Livingston County Outreach of Catholic Charities of Livingston County.

Frequent bills she helps to pay are for car repairs. No other sources of financial aid is available for these, she observed. Yet in her rural area — where public transportation is almost nonexistent — a working car is a necessity.

"There's a lot of people who are trying to get jobs who can't get them, or even if they have a job, can't get to them, because they don't have a car," Sister O'Brien said. "You can't have a car and take care of your family on \$5.50 an hour."

Christmas Appeal monies help the Catholic Charities agencies do more than provide food and help keep cars on the road, however. Sister O'Brien, Ciamprone and Smith also use the funds to help people pay for prescriptions, buy diapers, and cover utility bills and rent deposits.

Ciamprone even once used Christmas Appeal money to help a young single mother on public assistance pay a \$25 college admission fee. The woman is now a college graduate with a job.

"It was the best \$25 she ever spent,"

Ciamprone said.

Smith said she also tries to help the people beyond just meeting their emergency needs.

"When I assist somebody, I also sit down with them and work on a budget and see if I can help in other matters," Smith said.

And the people seeking help are not just the stereotyped poor, providers point out.

"More and more we're seeing middle-class families who have run into real problems," Ciamprone said. "People who have lost jobs and tried to make it on their own — now they are one or two mortgage payments behind."

"We're seeing a lot of grandparents raising grandchildren for one reason or another," McGarrity noted. "That's becoming more common."

Christmas is a time when the problems seem to grow, Smith observed.

"Christmas time is holiday time. You have to get your family presents," Smith said. "I think people get into the hype, and spend more than they should spend."

At the same time, though, the Catholic Charities service providers have had to deal with decreasing amounts available through the Christmas Appeal, whose collections have dropped off the last few years.

"I'd like to be able to help everybody, but the amount we have in our budget is not enough," Smith said.



1996
Catholic Courier • Catholic Charities
Christmas Appeal

Neediest Cases

Monies collected during the *Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities* Christmas Appeal aid people throughout the year, but especially at Christmas. The following are some of the individuals and families who have been helped with Christmas Appeal funds.

★ A man was unemployed for several months and bills had piled up. He received \$45 to get his furnace fixed in time for his wife's arrival home from the hospital with their fourth child.

★ A man living in a rural area has diabetes, but because he earns so little and has no health insurance, and the only local doctor would not take uninsured patients, he was not able to afford a visit to the doctor in the past year. He received cash vouchers for a doctor visit, and to refill his prescription.

★ An 87-year-old woman received \$56 for a 10-day supply of heart medication until she could obtain health care coverage for prescriptions.

★ A middle-aged man who was between jobs and was without health insurance received \$20 to pay for a prescription.

★ A 45-year-old nurse, with a 16-year-old son, is permanently disabled as the result of an injury at work. Now living on Worker's Compensation and SSI, she lost her home. She purchased an old mobile home in need of many repairs and was homebound because it had no ramp. Funds totaling \$324.85 were used to purchase materials for local Knights of Columbus volunteers to build a ramp.

★ A man with a wife and three children lost his job and was waiting for unemployment insurance payments to begin when he fell behind paying his water bills. He received \$25 in Christmas Appeal funds, which, combined with monies from other sources, kept the water flowing.

★ An elderly woman lives on a very limited income. She pays her bills before buying herself food. She received food vouchers to help her get food when her money has run out.

★ A single man currently living on unemployment compensation broke his hand. He was given \$41.90 to pay for a prescription ordered by his doctor.

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 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 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 of Livingston County, Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, and diocesan Urban Services.

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