

Christmas Appeal

Fund helps diocese provide food for families

What is the Christmas Appeal?

It is a cooperative effort of the Catholic Courier and diocesan Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester to raise funds for people in desperate financial crisis.

For the past 28 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?

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?

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 outreach; Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation; and diocesan Urban Services.

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By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Leslie Lyman's situation was bad enough to begin with.

The Rochester woman still had six children at home ranging in age from 10 to 17. A chronic asthmatic — "I take all kinds of medication" — she supported those children and herself with money from SSL.

Then in September she had to move. Her new home lacked a refrigerator, and she had to pay a security deposit, wiping out her money for the month.

But there were seven mouths to feed. That's when she turned to Rochester's Catholic Family Center.

"They helped me immediately," she said.

Arrangements were made for her to go to a food pantry, where she received "seven or eight" bags of groceries.

"I didn't expect it," she said. "When (a Catholic Family Center worker) called me, I told the kids. They were so excited."

Those bags of groceries were paid for with *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal funds.

The Christmas Appeal was begun in



1969 as a combined effort of diocesan Catholic Charities and the *Catholic Courier*. The Appeal provides a pool of money to help people in emergency situations who can't find help elsewhere, or who can't wait for that help to begin. Over the years, workers at Catholic Charities, the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation and diocesan Urban Services have tapped into the fund year-round to help provide everything from boots for children to mid-winter furnace repairs.

At the Samaritan Center of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier, the demand for that emergency help has grown in the last year, according to the director, Cindy Smith.

She estimated that the number of families coming in monthly has grown from 450 to 500 during the fall months of 1996 to 600 to 700 this year.

The vast majority of those people are the working poor.

"Most of them have been working," Smith said. "Most of them have jobs. But they just can't cut it at the end of the month."

Christmas Appeal monies are used for "special assist cases" — people who do not qualify for help in other ways — for such emergency needs as prescriptions, glasses and help with transportation, Smith explained. She reported that the number of special assist cases has grown in the last year from 12 a month to anywhere between 25 and 35 per month.

In addition, appeal funds have been used to buy extra food when the food pantry the center operates begins to run low on supplies.

"Without the Christmas Appeal, I don't think we would have been able to help as many people and families," Smith said. "There'd be a lot of sorry people down here."

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 mother of two children who was also supporting an 18-year-old pregnant niece fell behind in her mortgage, and her gas and electric were turned off after her hours were cut at her job. Appeal money was used to buy kerosene lanterns and a gas card so she could get to a place that offered day-to-day work with same-day pay.

★ A single woman with no income received \$19.99 to purchase a pair of dress shoes to wear to a job interview. She is now employed and very grateful for the help she received.

★ A single father of three children sought help to purchase school supplies for his children. He was given \$25 for the supplies.

★ A 21-year-old man had just been laid off and unemployment benefits had not begun. He was given money for bus transportation to visit his dying mother in another state.

★ A woman in her 30s had undergone dental surgery and was paying for dentures when her work hours were cut back. Assistance was provided in paying for the dentures. She was also given help with back rent, food and clothing.

★ A 20-year-old woman with two infants was given help to purchase medication for seizures, her first month's rent, and food and clothing. A victim of abuse, she had returned home from another state, where her home had burnt to the ground. Her family here could not afford to support her and the children.

★ Parents and their four children were faced with eviction after father was laid off. Unemployment had not taken effect and DSS had refused assistance. Appeal funds were used for back rent and food, and the family was able to stay in their home of 10 years while the parents looked for employment.

★ A man on a medical spend-down program needed medication for a heart condition and infection. Although other agencies could assist with the antibiotic for infection, none were able to help with the heart medicine. Funds were used to cover heart medicine; the client was referred to the indigent drug program, and a credit line with the local pharmacy was

set up.

★ An AIDS victim living in subsidized housing fell and cut himself, requiring hospitalization. Before he was allowed to return home, the housing authority insisted the apartment be sanitized. Because of the client's limited funds and high medical costs, funds were provided to sanitize the apartment.

★ An 82-year-old man was given \$35.10 to obtain a prescription.

★ A 19-year-old homeless man was given \$12.50 to pay for transportation to and from his job so that he could earn enough money to eventually afford a place to stay.

★ A 34-year-old armed forces veteran had to travel to Elmira from Painted Post for medical treatment. He did not have enough money to buy gas for the return trip. Funds were used to provide gas so that he could return home.

★ A family of five, trying to live on \$140 a week, needed \$100 to help with back rent to prevent eviction. The money was provided, and the family was also assisted with a Christmas basket/adoption connection with a corporation.

★ A single mother of a 2-year-old needed \$262.25 for materials to repair her car in order to get to work. Repair work was done by a volunteer.

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