

Christmas Appeal

Child inspires nun with holiday spirit

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Just before last Christmas, Sister Julia M. Norton, RSM, pastoral associate at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Rochester, received a phone call from a single mother who had cancer. The mother asked that Sister Norton come to her apartment and pray with her.

While they were praying in the woman's kitchen, the woman's 8-year-old daughter came out and asked Sister Norton if she wanted to see the family Christmas tree. The mother interjected that the sister wouldn't want to see it, but the girl was insistent, so Sister Norton accompanied the girl into the living room.

"All it was was a little drawing of a Christmas tree taped to the wall," Sister Norton recalled. She added that the girl was quite happy about the "tree" she had made.

"She was proud of her drawing," Sister Norton said. "That spoke to me well of her mother, that even though things were



Illustration by Linda Jeanne Rivers

very bad, she tried to make the best of it."

Using funds from the *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal, as well as parish donations, Sister Norton said her parish was able to give the woman and her daughter a real Christmas tree, tree decorations and furniture as well for the sparsely furnished apartment. The parish also gave the family food and gifts for Christmas, she said.

"One of the things the little girl wanted was a bicycle," Sister Norton said, noting that she was able to garner a donated bike that she gave to the child. "Her eyes just got so big," she said, remembering the girl's reaction upon seeing the bike.

Sister Norton added that she's kept in contact with the woman since Christmas, and that the woman has enjoyed some success in battling her cancer through chemotherapy. Sister Norton also said that she will never forget Christmas 1998 because of this family.

"I just had the joy of pulling together this tree for them," Sister Norton said. "It certainly made my Christmas."

People in need

Christmas Appeal funds are available year-round to people in need. The cases below are typical of those who received funds this past year.

★ A young single mom with two children and no income was able to flee a domestic violence situation and relocate to a safe and secure environment, with \$50 in appeal funds.

★ With \$20 assistance, a single mother bought the gasoline she needed to travel back and forth to work until she got her first paycheck.

★ A homeless man staying in a shelter used \$21.39 in Appeal funds to purchase insulin needed for his diabetes. He had no income and no medical coverage.

★ A grandmother on a fixed income used \$15 to help send an 8-year-old granddaughter she was caring for to summer camp. The money paid for the camp application fee.

★ Appeal funds of \$35 assisted an elderly gentleman in purchasing replacement glasses after his were broken. He was on a fixed income and his insurance would not cover replacement glasses.

★ A teenage mom purchased milk for her baby with \$20 in Appeal funds after her wallet containing a WIC benefit check was lost.

★ With \$39 in Christmas Appeal funds, a young woman struggling with addiction obtained round-trip bus transportation to a 30-day inpatient counseling program. Caseworkers said she had no income and desperately wanted help to regain control of her life.

★ With \$28 in Christmas Appeal funds a young disabled woman was able to get her telephone turned on for medical emergencies. She was on a fixed income with nothing left over.

★ A young woman used \$8 to obtain a picture ID for temporary agencies so she could start working. She was looking for work and had no income.

★ Christmas Appeal funds totaling \$30 assisted a young father with the purchase of special steel-toed work boots so he could secure a construction job and provide for his two school-aged children. The family had no income.

★ Sarah, an adult with developmental disabilities who lives in a family care house, was given \$45 from the Christmas Appeal fund to combine with some of her wages and a scholarship to use for Camp Joy this summer. Family care providers, trained by Catholic Charities Community & Residential Services, provide an environment with support, guidance and companionship at the home.

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 30 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; Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes; 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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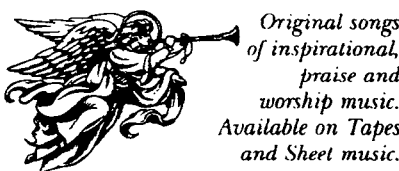
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