

Christmas Appeal

Story

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bus driver asked if she was OK. He suggested she go right to bed when she got home.

"I said I would if I had a bed," White said. The bus driver, a member of St. Andrew's Parish, told her she might find help through the St. Vincent dePaul Conference of his parish and St. Philip Neri Parish.

"I don't go looking for help. I don't know how," she said. But she followed up on his advice.

Using funds provided by the annual *Catholic Courier/Catholic Charities* Christmas Appeal, the conference provided two \$25 grocery vouchers. And its volunteers brought over the perfect size kitchen table, in good condition. They also planned to bring donated bedding.

"Nobody's ever helped me like that before. I just looked at them and cried," White said between tears. "They've gone so out of their way for me."

White is 48 and has a 14-year-old son, Joel, who lives with her. She rents the back part of a run-down house. As she talked about her life, a tiny kitten she saved from



the trash can played with a string dangling from her door. There's no door knob — just the string. The storm window is missing from the storm door. A neighbor girl leaned into the kitchen through the opening and asked White if she could stay there till her mom got home. Sure, White said.

To try to start the heater, White touches together two wires protruding from the bedroom wall. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't.

She's had break-ins. Her food stamps

have been stolen.

Her neighborhood is full of drug dealing, she said. In fact, several years ago White herself ran into a friend she hadn't seen in 10 years and "got mixed up with drugs," cocaine and crack. But she managed to quit that through a program at St. Mary's Hospital.

And though she continued treatment there for her mental health, she said she left after three years because she felt no better.

"I've gotten depressed," she acknowledged. "I can be hurt with a word or a look."

And sometimes she loses her temper, she said.

She still misses her mother, an invalid for whom she cared for 10 years until her death in 1990.

"I feel locked inside myself," she said. Pictures of White's family are taped to a wall. There's her mother, a frail looking woman. There's a daughter who lives in Puerto Rico. There's another daughter who lives in Rochester and has five children of her own. But they don't really get together.

When White's son recently turned 14, the Christmas Appeal helped her to buy a birthday cake so she could invite some relatives and neighbors over to celebrate.

"Let me tell you something," she said of St. Vincent dePaul group. "They made me feel human, like somebody actually cared. It's something I hadn't had for a long, long time."

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 crises.

For the past 31 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.

People in need

The situations below were submitted by case-workers from Catholic Charities agencies that have allocated Christmas Appeal funds for assistance, which is a available year-round.

* A single, working father with three children, two of whom have serious health problems, had to pay for car repairs. Without the car he could not drive to work, 50 miles away. But in paying for the repairs he fell behind covering other needs. Catholic Charities of Livingston County helped him with his water bill of \$72.44.

* An 80-year-old woman had lived in her family homestead all her life. She carried well water for dishes and cleaning, and went to her sisters' home for a bath twice a week. She would not move because her brother who lives nearby suffers from cancer, and she assists him daily. Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation helped her with her first hot water heater and water pump. Now hot water is available in her home.

* A single mother raising nine children and one grandchild has worked to

provide for the children — three of whom have special needs — and to give them a Catholic education. She managed to purchase an old home. Shortly after moving in, she found that essential repairs were needed, particularly plumbing and electric. St. Bridget's Parish used \$900 to help her with food, transportation to appointments and utility bills.

* A 29-year-old mother is the head of a household of five children, ranging in age from infancy to 9 years. The family is on welfare. Two weeks into each month their money and food stamps are used up in paying rent, food, gas and electric and other necessities. They are unable to buy food, clothing, toys, hygiene products, etc. House of Mercy used \$2,000 to help the family, particularly with food.

* "Mary," 50, was a panhandler until about four years ago. She was living in substandard housing while working on drug and alcohol recovery. St. Martin's Place used \$350 in Christmas Appeal money to help her make a \$350 security deposit on a new high-rise apartment. She has re-connected with her family and become involved in her community, and is financially independent.

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