

WORLD & NATION

Activists want taxpayers to give rebates to charity

By Ann Piasecki
Catholic News Service

ROMEONVILLE, Ill. — As rebate checks of up to \$600 continue to go out to American taxpayers, some Catholics are calling the 10-year, \$1.35 trillion tax cut unfair to the underprivileged.

Members of Pax Christi Servants, a DuPage County, Ill., group organized to promote equitable social justice programs, have decided to protest the tax cut by donating their refund checks to the charity of their choice. The donation idea, which is growing in popularity among Pax Christi supporters nationwide, is seen as a positive response to a law that denies Catholic social teachings, said Evelyn Brown, spokeswoman for Pax Christi Servants.

The Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001, the law that mandated the refunds, works to deny the needs of the underprivileged, said Sister Anne Curtis of Network, a national Catholic social justice lobby with headquarters in Washington, and a member of the Rochester Sisters of Mercy.

The Greater Rochester Community of Churches, which includes the Rochester Diocese, and Interfaith Alliance of Rochester are asking that checks for part or all of a rebate be sent to GRCC, earmarked "Redirect Your Rebate." A committee will meet in October to allocate contributions for advocacy, empowerment and economic development efforts aimed at supporting local families in overcoming poverty. GRCC is at 2 Riverside St., Rochester, NY 14613-1222.

Also, the Justice & Peace Ministry of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier is asking persons willing to share some of their refunds to send contributions to "Rebate," Catholic Charities, 215 East Church St., Elmira, NY 14901. "We'll see that it helps neighbors-in-need in your county," an August newsletter stated.

According to Sister Curtis, citizens in the upper tax bracket are receiving income tax rebates, while a number of the working poor are not because they don't earn enough to pay federal income taxes but still are required to fulfill state and Social Security obligations.

With so many people lacking basic needs, such as food, clothing, medical care and shelter, Sister Curtis called the bill "unconscionable." Sister Curtis argued that the distribution of the tax cut is overwhelmingly weighted in favor of the rich.

"Because we opposed this tax cut, it doesn't mean that we oppose all tax cut plans," she said. "But we want a fair and just policy."

Brown and other members of Pax Christi Servants are promoting a "giving back" plan, called Refund America.

"Pax Christi Servants have pledged to refund all or part of their refund checks to assist our nation's poor and to inform our legislators that we are opposed to this type of tax cut to help the well-off to the detriment of the poor," she said.

Group members have refrained from offering suggestions for specific charities, but ask supporters to select organizations that work with families or individuals on issues of particular interest to them.



Reuters/CNS

Happy Birthday

Missionaries of Charity gather around the decorated tomb of Mother Teresa in Calcutta Aug. 26, the 91st anniversary of her birth. A report on the life of Mother Teresa was submitted to the Vatican the week before in a step toward her possible beatification, a major move toward sainthood.

Catholic Workers help injured girl

By John Bohuslaw
Catholic News Service

HARTFORD, Conn. — Catholic Worker activists recently arranged treatment for Marwa Adel al-Sharif, a 10-year-old Palestinian girl who suffers from a bullet lodged in her brain.

The stray bullet had ricocheted into Marwa's house in a village near the West Bank city of Hebron while she was sleeping July 17. The bullet came from gunfire between Israeli military and Palestinians.

Christopher Allen Doucot, a resident of St. Martin de Porres House, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Hartford, heard of Marwa's plight during a peace-keeping mission to the Holy Land. Although the young girl had survived the bullet, removing it would require special surgery unavailable in the West Bank.

The girl's unemployed parents lacked money and were afraid to take their child to Israel for treatment. So Doucot and his colleagues began arranging for her medical care in Hartford. They secured passports and visas, doing in seven hours what Doucot said normally would take seven months. Getting the young girl out of the country also required crossing an Israeli checkpoint where the Catholic Workers said they ducked bullets that came within a few feet of their heads.

When Marwa and her mother arrived in

Hartford, the girl was admitted to Connecticut Children's Medical Center. At a press conference held at the hospital Aug. 22, Dr. Mark Iantosca, pediatric surgeon, said he would likely operate the week of Aug. 27, using a neuro-computer-guided surgical system. Both the hospital's neurosurgeon and anesthesiologist are donating their services.

The physician said Marwa appeared to have overcome a coma she suffered immediately after the shooting and "amazingly" survived what normally would have been a fatal gunshot wound to the brain.

He said the four-hour surgery was necessary because the bullet is migrating across the brain and could lodge in the cortex and do permanent damage. His prognosis was for an early recovery with only minor residual side effects.

"Why shouldn't Marwa be entitled to the same technology other children can receive? She is just as precious to God as other children," Doucot told *The Catholic Transcript*, Hartford archdiocesan newspaper.

Jessica Stewart, a member of a Catholic Worker community in Ithaca, and among the four activists who went to Israel, described both Marwa and her rescue as a "miracle of God."

When asked how she felt, Marwa broke into tears as she said through an interpreter that she was grateful to be able to receive medical help she could not receive back home.

The girl and her mother currently are staying at the St. Martin de Porres House of Hospitality. The girl's father and three siblings remained at their home.

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, a member of the Catholic Worker community of Ss. Francis and Therese in Worcester, Mass., said he and his colleagues had not planned on bringing one of the victims of the Palestinian-Israeli fighting back home with them.

"That's our regular work," he said, "to do the works of mercy as well as works of peace and justice."

"Jesus doesn't want to just preach to people; he wants to give them food," he told *The Catholic Free Press*, diocesan newspaper in Worcester.

Schaeffer-Duffy said having Americans meet Marwa and hear about her story can help peace efforts.

"It's easy to kill people when they're dehumanized," he added. "But when you see a child close up," people realize there has to be another way to resolve conflicts.

Contributing to this story was Tanya Connor in Worcester.

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