

Teenagers put focus on service

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

"It is in giving to all that we receive," we are reminded in The Prayer of St. Francis. That message has apparently registered with youth groups around the diocese, several of which have informed the *Catholic Courier* of their plans to spread holiday cheer.

• **Tioga Catholic Community:** Youth groups at all three of the cluster's parishes — St. Patrick's, Owego; St. John the Evangelist, Newark Valley; and St. Francis, Catatunk — have developed a tradition of "adopting" families for Christmas. Anita Martin, youth minister at St. Patrick's, said her church, working through Tioga County Rural Ministry, is providing for two families this year. They have amassed Christmas gifts, groceries and hospitality baskets to personally deliver to the families. "The kids really feel like they've made a difference in the families' lives," she said. St. Patrick's Meaghan Linehan, 17, remarked that the adopted families "are able to enjoy Christmas a little bit more without worrying about tight money situations. They also get the Christmas spirit they may not otherwise receive."

• **All Saints, Corning:** The parish's Teen Angel program has been fully embraced by the youth group. All told, 80 teens are each filling indi-



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier
 Elizabeth Rooney (from left), Laura Ramos, Zulet Ramos and Teisha Machetti, members of the junior-high youth group at Pittsford's St. Louis Church, wrap gifts in the St. Louis School gymnasium Dec. 8. The gifts were donated to families at Saint's Place, which helps relocate refugees.

vidual stockings for fellow youths who may not otherwise get such gifts as clothing and sneakers for Christmas. For example, "If they play a sport, we buy them whatever they need," said Marie McCaig, youth minister. These items are provided anonymously for teens in the Corning-Painted Post area. The community-sponsored Teen Angel program runs all year, yet McCaig said it's most active at holiday time.



• **St. Casimir/St. Charles Borromeo, Elmira:** Ten youths quickly volunteered to serve as bell ringers for the Salvation Army kettle drive Dec. 10 at Arnot Mall. And, on Nov. 29, approximately 15 teens helped serve lunch at the Community Free Soup Kitchen. They also provided an impressive variety of Christmas carols and other music that day: "Students brought their own instruments. We had flutes, a saxophone and a trombone," reported Maureen Donahue, faith-formation coordinator, who noted that the church organ was even transported to the soup kitchen.

• **Our Lady of Lourdes, Elmira:** Fourteen youth-group members took part in the parish's Operation Christmas Child Project, packing 20 shoe boxes for Samaritan's Purse, an international relief agency. According to Maggie Johnson, the parish's faith-formation director, the boxes contained such small items as Matchbox cars, tiny stuffed animals, soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, flashlights, pens and paper. In addition, the group donated \$45 toward the shipping of these gifts. Johnson added that "some (teens) sent out letters, and they might get a reply (from gift recipients)."

• **St. Louis, Pittsford:** The junior-

high youth group is providing gifts for families at Saints Place, a refugee relocation organization. Sue Mattina, youth minister, said each young person was assigned an item to purchase and wrap. One participant, Kirk Summers, 13, observed that the families need "many basic household items such as can openers and blankets." He noted that the many children in these families "do not have fathers and have very few possessions. And if that doesn't make you depressed, then I don't know what does — but at least this Christmas, they'll have a smile on their face." Mattina added that the youths are also writing letters to seniors and homebound people who are connected to St. Louis Parish.

• **St. Lawrence, Greece:** Both the junior-high and senior-high youth groups have arranged visits at the Shire at Culverton, an adult residence, to help with Christmas festivities there. The youths also have adopted two families through the Mary Cariola Center and are providing them with Christmas dinners, clothing and toys. On top of these efforts, youth-group members are diligently accumulating gifts for another charity, the House of Mercy. Cathie Bianchi, a youth minister at St. Lawrence, marveled at the teens' generosity, saying, "The kids bought extra gifts — they went above and beyond. Some kids took two names. Our kids are great."

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