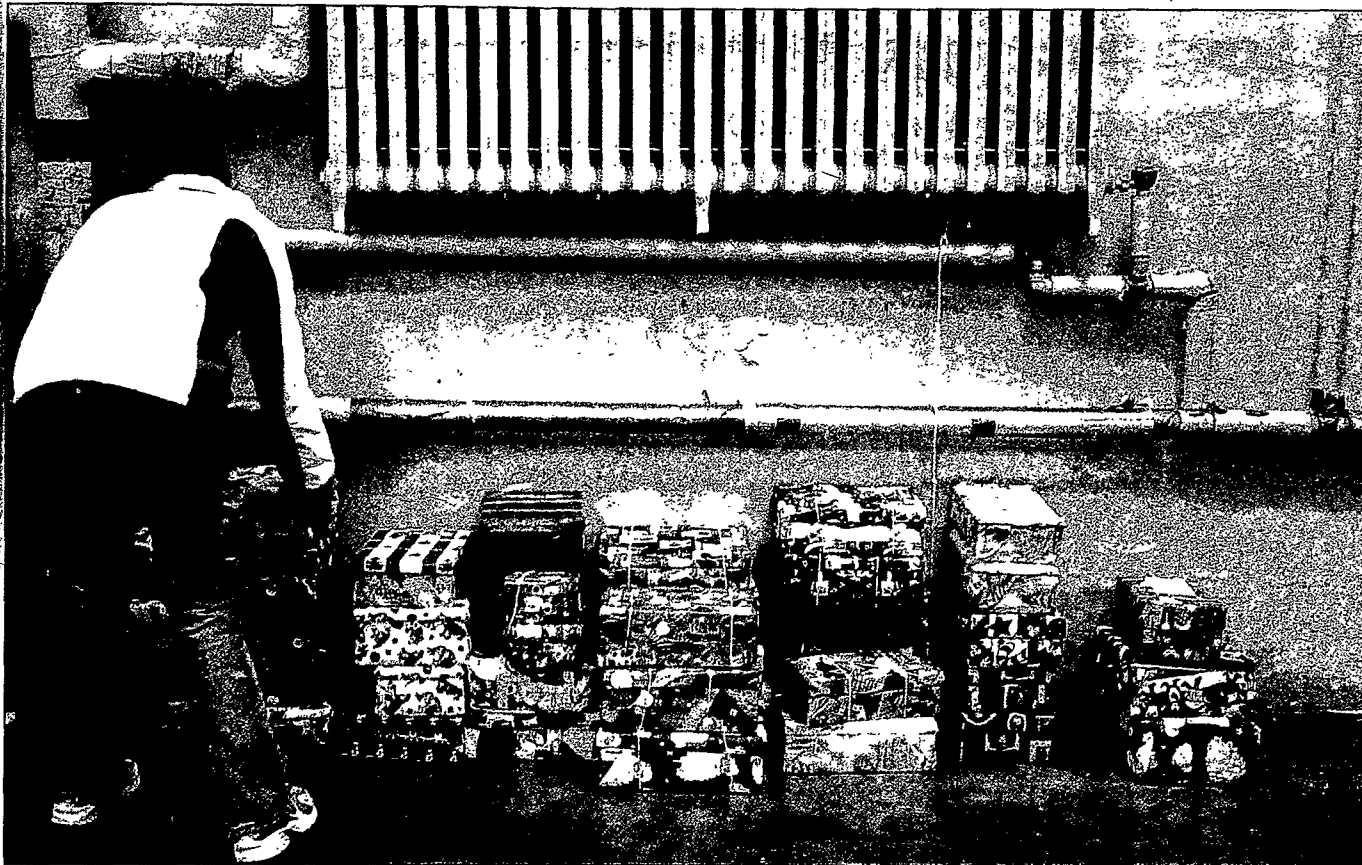


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Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Children and parents from the Holy Family Catholic Community cluster assembled Christmas packages Nov. 1 for Operation Christmas Child, which provides gifts to impoverished children worldwide. Thirteen-year-old Sarah Briggs, a parishioner of Sacred Heart of Jesus in Perkinsville, stacks wrapped gifts in the gymnasium of St. Joseph's School in Wayland.

## 'They need Christmas too'

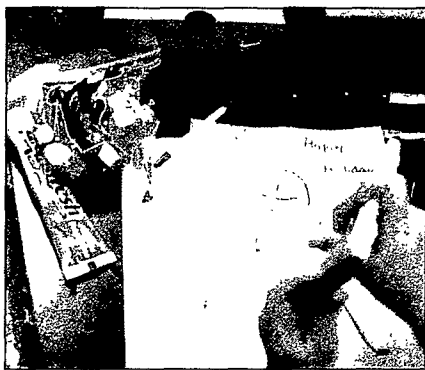
### Gift project benefits underprivileged kids

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

WAYLAND — Temperatures outside were creeping into the 60s. Folks inside the St. Joseph's School gymnasium had been busy with trick-or-treating barely 12 hours earlier. And now their focus was on ... Christmas?

The crinkling of wrapping paper filled the air Saturday morning, Nov. 1, as children and parents from the Holy Family Catholic Community cluster enthusiastically assembled Christmas packages. As a project for Operation Christmas Child, which provides gifts for poor children in nearly 100 countries, this initiative was being done nearly two months prior to Christmas due to the long distances the gifts must travel.

Approximately 70 parishioners took part in the effort. Spreading out at tables and even on the floor, they filled shoe boxes with such small items as toothbrushes, clothing, alarm clocks, gum, rosaries, baseballs, toy cars and pencils. Gift-givers were also encouraged to enclose photos of their families and write notes of encouragement, including their return address in case



A child draws a picture to be placed in a gift box.

a recipient wished to reply.

The project was being done for the first time in Holy Family Catholic Community, which includes St. Joseph's Parish in Wayland, Sacred Heart in Perkinsville, St. Mary's in Dansville and St. Pius V in Cohocton. Within an hour after the wrapping began, more than 50 packages were piled up on the auditorium floor, ready to be shipped to their faraway destinations.

"I'm thrilled," Linda Mehlenbacher, Holy Family's youth minister, said about the turnout. She said she felt the project was important so that "kids could get outside their boxes" and realize that not all young people have decent living conditions.

Operation Christmas Child was begun in 1993 by Samaritan's Purse, a nondenominational outreach based in Boone, N.C. Holy Family is among several participating parishes in the Rochester Diocese. As a whole, Operation Christmas Child provided gifts for 6.2 million children in 95 countries last year. Just before the wrapping began Nov. 1, those assembled at St. Joseph's School watched a video depicting the poverty that children endure in nations affected by war, hunger and disease. Along with gifts, participants were encouraged to write checks for monetary donations as well as to cover shipping costs.

Each package targeted a specific gender and age range. For instance, Cody Zone filled a shoe box for a boy age 5 to 9 with such items as a dental kit, toy dinosaurs, a Star Wars C3PO replica, a Tweety Bird toy, a rosary and other religious items.

"I have a cousin who's 5 years old and I thought of things he would like," said Cody, 12.

Cody, who said this was his first-ever attempt at wrapping a gift,



Seven-year-old Joshua Camp, a parishioner of St. Mary's in Dansville, writes a personal letter to the child who will receive the gift he assembled.

## Youth

struggled a bit to line up the paper and get rubber bands to fit over the shoe box. He rated the quality of his work "50-50," joking that he'd prefer any Christmas gifts he buys this year to already be decorated.

On a more serious note, Cody said he feels badly for children who don't get to experience joyful Christmases. "I just hope that whoever gets this is going to have a better year," he said.

Regina Crotser and Ashley Knights, both 13, prepared boxes and letters for little girls. They also voiced compassion for the impoverished children whom they'll never meet.

"They need Christmas too, and they don't have a lot of nice things," Ashley said. "Half of them don't even have shoes."

Regina said Operation Christmas Child gives her a fresh perspective on the nice Christmas presents that she receives each year.

"You kind of feel you take for granted what you usually get," she said. "These kids don't expect anything."

## Kids' Chronicle

Answers from page 12: 1. d, 2. f, 3. a, 4. e, 5. h, 6. g, 7. b, 8. c