

## THANKSGIVING

Continued from page B1

many ways. The stresses of life sometimes overwhelm us, and we begin to forget how fortunate we are," Father Gonyo said. "(Volunteering) helps us to be more in tune with those that are in need in our community, and to realize that not everyone has the material blessings that we do."

Starting around Thanksgiving each year, members of both of his parishes volunteer by collecting goods to use in Christmas baskets for the needy in the Sodus community. Each basket includes a turkey — donated by a local business — and enough food for one meal, as well as a small gift for each child in the family. Between the two parishes, 135 baskets were assembled last year and donated to local families, he said.

Children enrolled in the faith-formation program at St. Vincent De-Paul Parish in Churchville are en-

couraged to participate in service projects throughout the entire year, said Kathy Kuntz, the parish's faith-formation coordinator. In October, the children participated in Project Hats from Home, collecting baseball caps to send to members of the military serving overseas as a symbol of thanks for their service.

At Thanksgiving and Christmas, the children create cards to send to those serving overseas and to the homebound in their own community, she added. The goal of all of these projects is to help the children see the world beyond their own families and homes, to help them be thankful for what they have and to share their blessings with others, Kuntz said.

Children attending faith-formation classes in Elmira's St. Anthony/St. Patrick cluster also take part in holiday service projects. Each year around Thanksgiving, the children take part in Operation Christmas Child, said Rose Bennett, the cluster's religious-education coordinator.



## "Mamma, are we going to die?"

The question Shakille Walters, 6, asked as Hurricane Ivan's flood waters engulfed their Jamaican home had a chilling answer. "Yes," his mother Eugenie replied in a trembling voice.

Terrified, the little boy sank to his knees and prayed with his family for God to spare them. His family was saved, but their home was destroyed. They now sleep on a table in a shelter. "I pray to God to give me strength. We are here in distress," says Eugenie. Even the shelter manager sleeps in her car because she is homeless. The victims have lost everything — some, even their children. All that remains is their faith.

*"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we do not give up and quit." (2 Cor. 4:8)*

With your support, Food For The Poor will help them recover from this tragedy. We build homes, send medical supplies, food and more because we believe we serve Christ by serving the poor. The victims of Hurricane Ivan need your prayers and support today. To find out how you can help, contact us.



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At Food For The Poor, we work hard to be good stewards of your gifts. More than 95 cents of every dollar donated in 2003 went to programs that help the poor.



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For this project, children in preschool through sixth grade bring in pencils, lollipops, coloring books, crayons and other small items children enjoy, as well as hygiene items. Junior-high faith-formation students pack the items into shoe boxes, which are then sent to children in need around the world. The students like knowing that they're helping other children who don't have as much as they do, Bennett said.

Students at All Saints Catholic Academy in Gates hold a food drive each autumn, collecting food for local food cupboards in preparation for Thanksgiving. At Immaculate Conception School in Ithaca, the school's Home-School Association puts on an annual Thanksgiving Feast. Admission to the event is a nonperishable food item to be donated to the needy.

Similarly, when the Thanksgiving Mass collection is taken up at Rochester's Ss. Peter and Paul Parish, instead of money parishioners contribute nonperishable food items or paper products for their emergency food pantry.

"Really, we're a very poor parish, and we really don't have a lot of opportunities to contribute to something other than our own needs. It is an occasion that we can all offer thanks for what we have, as a parish," said Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Flass, pastoral associate.

Attending a Mass on Thanksgiving is by itself an important part of the holiday for many people, Father Gonyo noted. This year, his parishes will celebrate a Thanksgiving Mass with St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Ontario.

"A lot of people like to attend Mass because it starts the day with prayer and is a way of connecting with the day," Father Gonyo said.