

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

...YOU DO IT TO ME.

Almsgiving is an important pillar of a Lent lived well. Like fasting, it is a powerful way in which we deny ourselves and assert our love for God and our neighbor. St. Augustine said that almsgiving provides the Lord's prayer and its plea for forgiveness with "wings" that bring it to heaven. Acts of charity are essential to the spiritual life. To feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger and clothe the naked, to care for the sick and visit the imprisoned is to serve Christ himself. (See Matthew 25:31-46).

"Almsgiving" is essential to the life of a parish as well. If we wish to see Jesus as fully as we can, we must look also for him in the neediest. St. Teresa of Calcutta asked her sisters and volunteers who worked amongst the poorest to remember the words "you do it to me" should they ever find their task daunting. As a parish, our food pantry has provided for a number of people who are in need; with our Star youth group, we've collected gifts for needy families at Christmas; we supported the efforts of our Junior Catholic Daughters in raising money to construct a water well in Ghana; we've helped at various times with people visiting the rectory looking for a night in a motel or an electrical bill paid. However, our parish council and I have been aware that we have a responsibility to provide more opportunities for almsgiving to the parish at-large as a way to strengthen everyone's communal experience of the presence of Christ.

Last year, with the help of Mary Ellen Tiernan, our Faith Formation/RCIA/RCIT Coordinator, the parish submitted a request to the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation for funds to convert the convent building (next to the St. Thomas old school) into an outreach center for the neediest of the greater Newburgh area. In December, we received word from the foundation that we had been granted \$100,000 to create storage space, shelving, kitchen facilities, a chapel, and office space for the Saint Marianne Cope Outreach Center.

The Mother Cabrini Health Foundation provides grants to improve the health and well-being of

vulnerable New Yorkers, bolster the health outcomes of diverse communities, eliminate barriers to care, and bridge gaps in health services. The Foundation began with the sale of Fidelis Care, a nonprofit health insurer formed by the bishops of New York to help provide health resources to the poor. Then, the Foundation invited parishes and other diocesan organizations (although it is not limited to Catholic or faith-based institutions) to apply for grants to support or create programs to improve the quality of life for New York's neediest. Mother Cabrini Health Foundation took special interest in our concern for our neighbors in the greater Newburgh area.

I hope construction will begin soon, but in the meantime, we've gotten a good head start on providing for organizations in Newburgh which serve the underserved. Our Knights of Columbus, Star Youth Group, Junior Catholic Daughters and Catholic Daughters have been already providing 500 to 600 meals for the homeless at warming stations run by Newburgh Ministries. We are establishing a supporting partnership Project L.I.F.E, an interfaith organization which helps families in Newburgh to transition to permanent housing. We were able to help the seniors at Safe Harbors, Newburgh this past Christmas. Our recent calls for donations of food have been terrific.

Our parish council is excited to focus its attention on forming a viable and effective ministry to the poor that will inspire the parish and especially young adults and young people. Parish council member John LaGreca (outreach@stmariannecope.com) has agreed to help organize this new chapter in the parish's life. May I ask your prayers that this undertaking will provide fruit thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold for our parish as we continue to make the Lord present to all through our communion in Him.

