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FROM ARCHBISHOP'S APPEAL TO HAITI COLLECTION TO UPCOMING GALA

Catholics of Archdiocese of Washington offer 'incredible' generosity to poor

BY MARK ZIMMERMANN

Catholic Standard

Despite the economic downturn, Catholics of the Archdiocese of Washington continue to demonstrate great generosity in donating to efforts that support the poor in their community and around the world.

So far this year, local Catholics have generously supported the 2010 Archbishop's Appeal, a special collection for Haitian earthquake relief and a Lenten food drive. The annual gala benefiting the Spanish Catholic Center raised a record amount, and support for the May 15 Catholic Charities Foundation Benefit Gala is on track.

In February, the commitment weekend for the Archbishop's Appeal fell during one of the blizzards and had to be rescheduled for the next weekend. But local Catholics have pledged \$11,089,000 to the 2010 Archbishop's Appeal, amounting to one-quarter million dollars more in pledges at this time, compared to last year. About 35,000 donors have supported the appeal so far this year, about the same amount as last year, but a significant number of donors have increased the size of their gift.

'INCREDIBLE' APPEAL SUPPORT

"It is incredible," said Kevin O'Connor, the executive director of development for the archdiocese. "...The people know there's a great need, and they responded."

Last year, the appeal raised a record \$12.043 million. The goal for this year's appeal is \$11.75 million.

The Archbishop's Appeal provides essential funding for the archdiocese's educational outreach, including tuition assistance for Catholic school students, support for parish religious education, funding for the training of seminarians, for priest chaplains serving at area colleges and universities, and for the archdiocese's Office of Youth Ministry and Catholic Youth Organization.



CS PHOTO BY MICHAEL HOYT

During the recent Share in Hope Food Drive taken up at parishes across the Archdiocese of Washington during Lent, volunteers Josie Ky, Cathy Phan and Katie Vivian sort out donations at the food pantry at St. Martin of Tours Parish in Gaithersburg. Local Catholic parishes and schools collected more than 122,000 pounds of food in the drive.

The appeal provides key funding for the outreach of the archdiocese's Catholic Charities, with support for charitable programs at more than 80 locations, including Anchor Mental Health, the Kennedy Institute serving people with developmental disabilities, and the Spanish Catholic Center that provides a range of services to immigrants.

O'Connor said that so far, donors have responded in an "unprecedented way," and they have exemplified the theme of this year's appeal, taken from *Psalm 138*: "I will give you thanks, O Lord." He also praised the leadership of pastors and parish appeal coordinators.

In a *Catholic Standard* column about the appeal, Archbishop Donald Wuerl wrote, "Each of us is called in our own way to give thanks to God for all that he has given us... The Archbishop's Appeal allows all of us to respond to the many people who turn to Christ's Church for help."

As this year's appeal was launched, organizers emphasized that each gift makes a difference in the lives of people in this

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community, giving them help and hope for a better future.

The people of the archdiocese “understand the importance of the Archbishop’s Appeal, and they fully and strongly support the ministry and programs funded by the appeal and want them to succeed,” O’Connor said.

In encouraging Catholics to give generously to the appeal, Msgr. John Enzler, the archdiocesan vicar for development and the pastor of the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Washington, said, “We are committed to the poor, the needy, the hungry and the sick, because we follow the Gospel, we believe in the Gospel, and we want to do the work of Jesus in today’s world.”

RECORD HELP FOR HAITI

Pledges for the Archbishop’s Appeal were taken up just weeks after Catholics in the archdiocese contributed to special parish collections benefiting Catholic Relief Services’ outreach to Haiti following the devastating Jan. 12 earthquake there. Catholics in the Archdiocese of Washington donated almost \$1.3 million to help the people of Haiti.

“The outpouring of support from the people of the Archdiocese of Washington has been astounding. This is one of the largest collections in archdiocesan history,” said Auxiliary Bishop Barry Knestout, who also serves as vicar general for the archdiocese. “The generosity reflects the deep love and concern our parishioners have for our neighbors in need.”

In addition, more than a dozen local parishes have twinning or other relationships with Haitian parishes, and area parishes and Catholic have sent volunteers and supplies to Haiti to help with the relief effort. Last month, Catholic Relief Services announced that the collection for Haiti taken up at parishes across the United States has so far raised nearly \$60 million.

GIFTS FROM THE HEART

During Lent, the annual gala for the Spanish Catholic Center raised a record \$450,000. Father Mario Dorsonville, the vice president of mission and director of immigrant and refugee services for Catholic Charities, announced to the guests at the gala, “On this night, we have reached a milestone. For the first time, the Spanish Catholic Center is matching the wonderful support that it receives every year from the Archbishop’s Appeal for all its programs.”

The center provides medical, dental, legal, immigration and social services to newly arrived immigrants and refugees from around the world. Last year, the center served 29,000 people from 130 countries.

In a recent interview, Father Dorsonville said he feels gratitude for all those who support the Spanish Catholic Center’s work, from staff to volunteers to donors. “It doesn’t matter how much you are going to give. It matters that you give,” the priest said. “They (donors) are connected by heart to what we do.”

HELP FOR THE HUNGRY

Also during Lent, the archdiocese’s “Share in the Hope Food Drive” taken up at parishes and schools collected more than 122,000 pounds of food for area food banks and pantries.

“(This help came) at a time when we’re seeing 25 percent more families needing food assistance,” said Edward Orzechowski, the president and CEO of Catholic Charities.

When the amount collected was announced, Orzechowski said, “This was a great collaboration between people of goodwill to help their neighbors in need.”

During the drive, more than 70,000 paper bags were handed out at 108 parishes and 25 Catholic schools across the archdiocese.

Nancy Vawter, director of campus ministry at St. Vincent Pallotti High School and the director of youth ministry at neighboring St. Mary of the Mills Parish in Laurel, said in an interview, “Our young people care very deeply about making sure everyone gets fed. We had students give up their lunch and use that money for a donation. The students really stepped up to make a difference for the hungry.”

CATHOLIC CHARITIES GALA

Now, staff and volunteers are working hard to enlist support for Catholic Charities’ 25th anniversary gala, scheduled for May 15 at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington and featuring noted Broadway entertainer Michael Cavanaugh (see sidebar story on this page.) The gala provides major support for the outreach of Catholic Charities, the largest non-governmental social services provider in the Washington area. Last year, Catholic Charities served more than 124,000 men, women and children at its 81 programs across the District of Columbia and the surrounding Maryland counties in the archdiocese.

In an interview this past week, Orzechowski offered thanks to the people of the archdiocese for their faithful support of Catholic Charities.

“When you consider the tough economy we’re in, while many families need to be cautious about their own family budget, they continue to be very generous in supporting Catholic Charities, knowing that the need for our services remains very high,” he said. “The poorest among us need help today. People understand that” and have responded generously, he added.

As the Catholic Charities Gala approaches, Orzechowski said that staff and volunteers “are working hard to meet our goal, and we’re optimistic and hopeful (that) we’ll be successful.”

Orzechowski regularly visits Catholic Charities’ outreach programs in neighborhoods throughout the archdiocese, and he said that he personally witnesses the difference that people’s generosity makes in the lives of their neighbors who are struggling to get through a crisis and to succeed in the long run.

The president of Catholic Charities praised the legacy of giving that volunteers and donors have demonstrated over the past 25 years to the Catholic Charities Gala, raising \$14.7 million, and providing the agency with its largest single source of unrestricted funding, money that can be used wherever it is needed most.

Gala volunteers and donors, he said, “give of their time and talent to make our community a better place.”

“ON THIS NIGHT, WE HAVE REACHED A MILESTONE. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE SPANISH CATHOLIC CENTER IS MATCHING THE WONDERFUL SUPPORT THAT IT RECEIVES EVERY YEAR FROM THE ARCHBISHOP’S APPEAL FOR ALL ITS PROGRAMS.”

FATHER MARION DORSONVILLE
Catholic Charities
