

AAA's 'light' offers hope to those in need

BY MICHAEL C. GABRIELE

Editor

NEWARK—"Pledge Week," which kicks off the 2012 Archbishop's Annual Appeal (AAA), will be held Feb. 4 and 5 at parishes throughout the four counties of the Archdiocese of Newark.

Supported by the generosity of the faithful, last year the AAA donations registered a 2.5-percent increase compared with the previous year—despite the sluggish economy. This "modest" year-to-year gain is viewed as a major accomplishment during the current period of high unemployment and lingering financial insecurity, when many charitable organizations have suffered significant declines in their donations.

The hope is that the same spirit of compassion for those in need will illuminate this year's AAA campaign, which has adopted the theme of "Come Be My Light" to promote its fund-raising efforts.

The theme for the 2012 AAA was inspired by the title of Mother Teresa's 2007 book, which published a collection of reflections and "Private Writings by the Saint of Calcutta." Carla Repollet, executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development, said the book shows how Mother Teresa came to a deeper awareness of how she was "a light" sent by God to help others.

"To be a 'light' is to live out the faith in practice," Archbishop John J. Myers stated in the 2012 AAA video, which was distributed to the 219 archdiocesan parishes earlier this month. "Through good deeds and acts we come out of the darkness and into God's light and, in turn, we become the beacons of hope for those in need."

The video points out how contributions to the AAA assists and protects the homeless, the unborn, the young and the elderly. Funds also go to support the work of parishes and the three seminaries in the archdiocese. Last year Catholic Charities, which receives funds from the AAA, helped 80,000 people with housing, food, shelter, job training, healthcare and social services.

Donations raised by the AAA are used to help the poorest and most vulnerable members of the archdiocesan community. There are various ways to contribute to the AAA: a one-time gift; a pledge with installment payments; payments online through the archdiocesan Web site (www.rcan.org); with appreciated stock that also reduces capital gains tax; and using an employee matching gift program. Call the archdiocesan Development Office at (973) 497-4129 for more information on the AAA.

The need this year remains great for those who are less fortunate, Repollet said. "There's a lot of uncertainty these days because of the economy, but we would never accomplish anything if all we did was worry about the 'what ifs' in life." Rather than become overwhelmed by the grand designs and programs promoted to assist the needy, Repollet suggested that, when it comes to making a pledge to the AAA, people should think of small, specific, real-world acts of kindness—such as donating the \$2 a day someone spends for a morning cup of coffee.

According to recent government statistics, one out of every six Americans now lives in poverty—a major threat to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being for those who reside in the Archdiocese of Newark. It's estimated that more than 46 million Americans meet the federal government's guidelines that determine poverty—for a family of four, poor means having an annual income of \$22,350 or less. "Supporting the AAA is an opportunity to provide hope, faith and love to so many in our community," Archbishop Myers said.

The Office of Stewardship and Development sponsored the annual AAA kickoff reception, which was held Jan. 10 at the Archdiocesan Center. The gathering serves as forum to say "thank you" to all the parish volunteers who work to collect AAA contributions. It's also an opportunity to recognize parishes that went "above and beyond" their stated AAA campaign goals from the previous year. The incentive to exceed the goal means a larger rebate for parishes. Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Hackensack garnered the top spot for its fund-raising efforts—403 percent of its goal. Holy Trinity Parish, Fort Lee, was second (281.2 percent), followed by Immaculate Heart of Mary/Saint Patrick Parish, Elizabeth (249.3 percent), Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Ridgewood (248.9 percent) and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Montclair (230.4 percent).



Advocate photo – M. Gabriele
Father Francisco Arredondo (center), O.F.M., Cap., the parochial vicar of Saint Francis of Assisi Parish, Hackensack, accepts a plaque of appreciation on behalf of his parish for achieving the highest percentage of its goal, among all 219 archdiocesan parishes, for 2011 AAA contributions. Presenting the plaque to Fr. Arredondo was Archbishop John J. Myers (right) and Carla Repollet, the executive director of the archdiocesan Office of Stewardship and Development.