

A gift of food leads to an education

Could they feed one more hungry child? How about one more after that? And then another?

At St. Ann, Hagerstown, the goal of the Littlest Angels program is to make sure every one of the 500 preschoolers enrolled in the school of its sister parish in Haiti receives one nutritious meal a day.

St. Ann has adopted the St. Claire parish in Haiti. In Haiti – one of the world’s most destitute countries – one out of every five children dies before their fifth birthday. Malnutrition leaves children vulnerable to disease, and desperate parents send their children to school, not for an education, but for food to survive.

Last year during Lent, the parish decided to try to feed all of the preschoolers, said Agnes Supernavage, a parishioner of St. Ann and a project assistant with the Baltimore Haiti Outreach Project. It takes about \$50 to feed one child every school day for one year, and the parishioners of St. Ann raised enough to feed almost 400 children.

“The youngest children are most at risk for disease and early death from malnutrition,” she said. “That is the reason we target that age group.”

As a result of the program, enrollment has increased, Ms. Supernavage said, adding the children no longer fall asleep in school and are better able to learn when they have a decent meal.

“And we know that we are helping more than that one child; in families where resources are scarce, because that one child has been fed at school, it leaves more food available for the other members of the family,” Ms. Supernavage said.

The parish also partners with the school through prayer, and the Lenten efforts help the givers, too.

“In our parish, too, the benefits have been great; parishioners feel more connected to our sister parish and they feel that the results are tangible and rewarding,” she

said. "Some parishioners even support the program year-round. Last year, we were surprised that many non-parishioners contributed and became involved in parish life just from hearing about the program and its purpose."

This year's program begins Feb. 16 and 17. Donation envelopes are available in the parish office, and donors can receive a class picture of the preschoolers supported by the Littlest Angels program.

For more information, call the parish office at 301-733-0410.