

Archdiocese, parishes reach out to those in emotional pain

From Canton to Parkville, pastors say they are seeing parishioners struggle daily with economic issues.

“Every week more of our parishioners are being laid off from work,” said Monsignor James P. Farmer, pastor of St. Ursula, Parkville. “They’re under tremendous strain and the stress impacts their marriages and children.”

Conventual Franciscan Father Ross M. Syracuse, pastor of St. Casimir, Canton, said a number of people recently admitted during a healing service that they or a close family member lost their jobs.

“There’s a lot of insecurity,” he said.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore and many local parishes want people to know they are not alone.

The worst-case scenario occurred recently in the Archdiocese of Baltimore when two separate men killed their families and themselves after battling depression and financial problems.

Alan Wood, who was a parishioner with his family at Holy Family Catholic Community in Middletown, killed his family April 18. Loyola College in Maryland sophomore Stephanie Parente was murdered with her New York family in a Towson hotel room by her father, William Parente April 19.

“You just don’t want to end up feeling hopeless and helpless and do things you normally wouldn’t do,” Father Syracuse said. “We let people know the Lord is with them no matter what comes their way.”

During the annual Archdiocesan pilgrimage to Washington April 25, Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien made mention of the tragedies in his homily.

“Our Catholic community of Baltimore has been shocked, even dazed in recent days

by murder-suicides involving nine of our Catholic people, some so very young,” the archbishop said. “What does that say about the evil remnant of original sin in all of our lives? And what does it say about a culture of greed in our institutions of finance and politics that have devastated our economy and have resulted in so many lives of desperation today?”

The archbishop also recently appeared in a television commercial addressing economic woes. In it, he says people should build up heavenly treasures and seek comfort in a local Catholic church.

The commercial is available at www.archbalt.org, along with a link to various resources for economic stress, family support and mental health services.

Kristin Witte, the archdiocese’s coordinator for pastoral care in the division of youth and young adult ministry, said Catholics must reach out to people facing hardship.

“By greeting people you may not have spoken to before at church, looking them in the eye and engaging them in a conversation, you have welcomed them as family,” she said.

As more and more people lose their jobs, donations and tithings decrease, causing churches to adjust their budgets. Even still, many parishes are quietly assisting some with their medical, housing and school bills.

Monsignor Farmer reminds parishioners there is real purpose in prayer during difficult times.

“We keep trying to emphasize God is our refuge,” Monsignor Farmer said. “There is great uncertainty. No one knows how long this recession is going to last. We just know faith conquers fear and Jesus is the reason for our faith.”