

Archdiocese seeks \$6 million in 2007 Lenten Appeal

For three children at Ascension School in Halethorpe, the 2006 Cardinal's Lenten Appeal guaranteed a Catholic school education this year.

The outpouring of contributions from Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore last year was just "pennies shy" of the \$6 million Cardinal William H. Keeler sought for philanthropic endeavors in the region, and he is hoping to raise the full amount this year by Easter Sunday, said Kathleen M. Whitelock, marketing director for the archdiocesan Department of Development.

The \$8,000 grant the Ascension School received offset the \$3,600 annual tuition for three families, making it possible to send their children to the pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade Catholic school, said Rita Anne Swift, principal. (The annual tuition for non-parish members is \$4,200.)

"The tuition would have been a hardship for these families if they didn't have that assistance," Ms. Swift said. "This was a big help to them. We're grateful the archdiocese sees the value in assisting these families."

Cardinal Keeler has made tuition assistance a priority for the archdiocese and last year encouraged underprivileged families - especially among Hispanic immigrants - to seek financial assistance from the church to provide their children with a quality Catholic education.

The Ascension School money was a small fraction of the \$1.5 million from last year's Lenten Appeal the archdiocese gave to archdiocesan schools, and the cardinal is hopeful area Catholics will be generous during this season of sacrifice to allow the church to continue its good works in the coming year, Ms. Whitelock said.

"We're having a better start this year than we did last year," she said. "It's too early to really say how much has come in so far - since Ash Wednesday wasn't that long ago - but if gifts keep coming in like this, we'll meet our \$6 million goal, or exceed it by Easter."

The Lenten Appeal officially began Ash Wednesday, prompting parish priests to announce the campaign from the lectern and in bulletins.

Maryland Catholics have also been able to connect to a video message about this year's appeal online at www.archbalt.org/cla, detailing how to give and how the money is used.

The big push began the weekend of March 2 as 180,000 Maryland Catholics began receiving packets in the mail demonstrating the importance of participation in the Lenten Appeal and the options parishioners have in donating – be it online, through the mail or from envelopes handed out in their churches.

“The message we’re really trying to convey this year is for everyone to participate, regardless of amount,” Ms. Whitelock said. “Sure, I’d love to have \$1-million contributors, but the donations hold greater meaning when more people participate.”

In addition to the \$1.5 million given to archdiocesan schools from the 2006 campaign, the archdiocese also doled out roughly \$1.5 million for outreach to the poor through Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, and \$2.33 million for pastoral endeavors, which include prison ministries, Hispanic ministries, deaf ministries and housing ministries, she said.

“We’re looking for the maximum participation from people responding to this appeal,” Cardinal Keeler said. “We need to have more individual givers, so it will be seen that our people are standing as one family in responding to a variety of needs.”

Parishes will receive back 25 percent of all the funds they raise up to their target and 50 percent of what they raise over their target through the Cardinal's Lenten Appeal. They can spend their parish share as they see fit, with some churches planning to contribute a portion to other parishes within the archdiocese that often have greater financial needs.