

# Cumberland outreach helps clothe children

CUMBERLAND – Standing next to piles of neatly folded children’s shirts and dainty toddler’s dresses hanging overhead on hangers, Ellie Mantheyi was pleased with the quantity and quality of the apparel.

“It’s mostly used clothing donated by parishioners,” said Ms. Mantheyi, coordinator of the children’s clothing outreach program at St. Mary, Cumberland. “Some of it is brand new. Our parishioners are very generous.”

The outreach program started about three years ago to help struggling parents throughout the community clothe their children. The church accepts donations of pants, shirts, dresses, jackets and more which are then distributed free of charge to anyone who needs them.

Children in several local schools have benefited from the outreach and word of mouth brings many young mothers and guardians to the basement of St. Mary’s parish center on Wednesday mornings to peruse the items. The program operates weekly from 9-11 a.m.

“We definitely need services like this to help people,” said Ms. Mantheyi. “Until we started this, so many people didn’t know what to do or where to go. They are so thankful.”

Many of the program’s patrons are non-Catholic and some include grandparents who are raising their grandchildren, Ms. Mantheyi said. All who benefit from the program have genuine needs and the church rarely finds anyone taking advantage of the outreach, she said.

“They share their stories with us and we listen,” she explained.

Ms. Mantheyi said she views the outreach as a kind of ministry and an important expression of the Catholic presence in Allegany County. She believes parishioners have been called by God to be active in the program.

“My faith has grown as a result of this,” she said.