Holy Childhood Association appeals to today's kids

Catholic schools and religious education programs not only educate children about their faith, they also help children grow spiritually, including teaching them to become missionary.

"We want them to be aware that they are among the most fortunate," said Kelly Hellmuth, Holy Childhood Association coordinator. "The Catholic church is missionary by its very design and nature."

If the name Holy Childhood Association sounds familiar, that's because it is – the program has been around for 164 years. But it's been revived in the past five years to encourage elementary school children not only to give but to learn about the world and the role of a universal Catholic church.

"It's not just a collection, it's an education program," Ms. Hellmuth said.

For example, Around the World is a geography-based program that teaches children about missions and other countries. Each classroom gets a map and a globe bank, and students learn about the 110 countries served by the Holy Child Association. They'll pick a country, pray daily for children there, make a personal sacrifice and then offer it up for the globe bank.

"For every $10 the class saves, they get to adopt a country, and they get a sticker – the idea is to fill up the map," Ms. Hellmuth said. "A second-grader had gotten $10 for his birthday, and he gave $5 of it to the collection. That's exactly what our goal is: I have something, let me share it with someone else."

At St. John the Evangelist School, Severna Park, teachers have tied Around the World into their social studies program.

Said Jo Beth Hartz, religion coordinator at St. John, "We are hoping that in participating in Holy Childhood we will raise an awareness within our students of the dire poverty of most of the world and their responsibility to follow Jesus'

command to serve the poor. As Jesus said, "… to those who have been given much, much will be demanded."

That active participation in missionary work also strengthens children's relationship with God.

The Holy Childhood Association was started in 1843 by Bishop Charles de Forbin-Janson, who was horrified by the plight of Chinese children abandoned in the streets. He envisioned a society similar to the Propagation of the Faith but aimed at children. Baltimore was the second city in the United States – New Orleans was the first – to participate in 1846. The Holy Childhood Association was raised to Pontifical status in 1922 by Pope Pius XI.

Currently, nine schools and eight parish religious education programs are participating in the Holy Childhood Association, but the goal is 100 percent participation in the archdiocese.

"There is a lot of work ahead of us," Ms. Hellmuth said.

To learn more about the Holy Child Association, please call Ms. Hellmuth at 410-547-5498 or visit the Web site www.worldmissions-catholicchurch.org and check out the link for educators/catechists.