

Mount de Sales senior collects, donates first Communion dresses

By Elizabeth Skalski

eskalski@catholicreview.org

Molly Wheltle experienced a modern-day-version of “Feeding the 5,000” when she set out to collect 20 first Communion dresses to donate to the less fortunate.

She collected 85.

“I was so excited we could help so many people,” said Wheltle, a senior at Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville.

On March 4 the dresses were distributed, free of charge, to about 25 girls at Sacred Heart of Jesus – Sagrado Corazon De Jesus Highlandtown. Socks, shoes, rosaries, prayer books and medals were also donated.

“We think everyone got the dress they wanted,” said Wheltle, 17. “If they fit, people could take it.”

Wheltle said she heard squeals of delight coming from a makeshift dressing room set up at the church so the girls could try on the dresses.

“I never thought about the expenses of getting a first Communion dress,” said Wheltle, a parishioner of St. Mark, Catonsville. “I remember on my first Communion that you dress up. You need to make receiving the Eucharist for the first time special.”

The project was for her Girl Scout Gold Award and was a “witness of faith,” Wheltle said. “I really grew in my faith through it.”

Sister Anne Catherine Burleigh, a Dominican Sister of St. Cecilia and principal of Mount de Sales, said “It makes sense to me that Molly would pick a project involving her faith.

“She saw there was a need for people who maybe didn’t have the finances,” Sister

Anne Catherine said.

Last June, after her project was approved by the Girl Scouts, Wheltle contacted five parishes – St. Mark and St. Agnes in Catonsville, Our Lady of Victory in Arbutus, Church of the Resurrection and Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Ellicott City – about posting a notice in their bulletins about the dress collection and approval to set a box at the back of each church. She set a box in each church last July.

In October, with the help of a student group at school, Wheltle and about 20 classmates made and decorated 45 veils using headbands, tulle, combs, flowers and hot glue. She made additional veils at home and 15 more were donated, said Wheltle, who estimated that she spent about 100 hours last summer on the project.

“It’s a lot of hours,” Wheltle said.

Redemptorist Father Robert Wojtek, pastor of Sacred Heart, said the dress distribution “was very successful.”

“It makes the day special (for the girls),” Father Wojtek said. “(Parents) would be sacrificing for their child so they wouldn’t be standing out differently. It was well received.”

The remaining dresses were left at Sacred Heart, said Wheltle, who isn’t sure if this will become an annual tradition at Sacred Heart but “would have no problem with other people doing it.”