

# Packing hope in a box

More than a year after Hurricane Katrina, many people from Gulfport, Miss., are now returning to their hometown. The houses may be built, the streets cleaned and the families eager to move on with their lives, but the everyday items for their homes are missing.

After reading an article in the Religious Sisters of Mercy newsletter about the sisters' plans to help welcome the people of Gulfport back home, Sister Anne O'Donnell, R.S.M., principal of St. Joseph School in Cockeysville, contacted her fellow sisters to lend a hand. She presented the idea of a household item drive to her staff, and they immediately sprang into action involving the parish as well as the school.

"Whenever we reach out to help other people, people come together," said Sister Anne. "It was a wonderful effort."

The parishioners and students donated new items including everything from blankets and sheets to microwaves and irons. Some students brought in money so their teachers could purchase items to donate. A few local stores pitched in to donate a box of flip flops and two boxes of assorted toys.

Once the items had been collected, everyone gathered to place the items in boxes and load them onto a truck which would deliver the boxes to the Sisters of Mercy in Mississippi. The parish and school brought in so many items that they filled 106 boxes, said Michele Kogler, director of development for St. Joseph.

Over the summer the students decided to raise money for those affected by Katrina by having a summer reading program. Through this program they raised about \$1,000. The school also raised \$400 during a Chick-fil-A fundraiser, and \$1,400 was donated to the poor box to be sent to Mississippi. A portion of the money was used to

rent the truck that transported the items while the other portion, close to \$2,500, was put in a check to be used as the sisters see fit, said Sister Anne.

“We were all so happy to reach out and help so many people,” said Sister Anne. “We do that often, but this was a whole parish effort.”

When the 106 boxes of household supplies arrived at the door steps of the Sisters of Mercy in

Gulfport, they were shocked and extremely grateful for the love and support the people of St. Joseph had shown, said Sister Anne.

“I think the children learned that they have a lot and we should be reaching out to help other people in need,” said Sister Anne. “They learned to respect and value other people.”

This isn’t the only project the students have undertaken.

Immediately after Hurricane Katrina, the students started a monetary collection to help those in need. The Home School association matched what the students brought in, making the overall donation about \$6,000.

“These children have so much and whenever you ask them for something they give beautifully,” said Sister Anne.