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BI-WEEKLY NEWS BULLETIN OF THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

January 29, 2012

Church Calendar

Events of the local, American and universal church

Feast days



St. John Bosco

Our Lady of Lourdes

- Jan. 31 St. John Bosco
- Feb. 2 Presentation of the Lord
- Feb. 3 St. Blaise, St. Ansgar
- Feb. 5 World Day for Consecrated Life
- Feb. 6 St. Paul Miki and companions
- Feb. 8 St. Jerome Emiliani, St. Josephine Bakhita
- Feb. 10 St. Scholastica
- Feb. 11 Our Lady of Lourdes, World Day of the Sick

World Day for Consecrated Life - Feb. 5

This annual celebration highlights persons who are consecrated to Christ by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The day offers the opportunity to thank God for the gift of consecrated life, to promote knowledge of the life, to invite consecrated people to celebrate what the Lord has accomplished in them and to acquire more awareness of their mission in the church and in the world.



Clergy appointments

The Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL, Bishop of Erie, announces the following clergy appointments:

Father Mark Hoffman, appointed pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Corry, and St. Elizabeth Parish, Corry, for a term of six years. Effective February 7, 2012.

Father Michael Polinek, appointed parochial vicar of St. George Parish, Erie, for a term of three years. Effective February 7, 2012.

Father David Poulson, appointed dean of the Meadville Deanery, to complete the term of Father Mark O'Hern, newly appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Erie. Effective January 13, 2012.

Father Johnathan Schmolt, appointed pastor of St. Bridget Parish, Meadville, for a term of six years. Effective January 23, 2012.

Facing down poverty

Church, Catholic Charities trying to meet increasing needs

By Jason Koshinski
FaithLife editor

Across northwestern Pennsylvania, the Catholic Church and Catholic Charities agencies are on the frontlines of the economic crisis, trying to meet the increased needs of individuals and families. But agencies are seeing more and more faces and the need is ever increasing.

Poverty statistics are up in the 13 counties that make up the Diocese of Erie.

According to its 2010 annual report, Catholic Charities served 82,106 clients in 2010, with 29,169 of those clients being children/adolescents under the age of 18.

In Sept. 2011, the U.S.

Census Bureau released its 2010 American Community Survey which showed nearly one in three residents in the City of Erie are living below the national poverty standard. For children, that number increased to more than 43 percent.

There are pockets of high poverty throughout the diocese.

"Certainly we have had increased calls," said Mary Maxwell, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Erie. "We only have so much capacity, so we do what we can do."

Maxwell said Catholic Charities is concerned about the poverty rate of children.

"About half of children in



One in six children (nearly 13 million) in America lives below the national poverty standard, according to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

Defining poverty

The U.S. Census Bureau considers a two-member household to be in poverty if there is a combined per year gross income of \$14,218 or less; a four-person household poverty level is \$22,113.

Erie County live in poverty. That's an incredible statistic," Maxwell said. "Nearly half of all children in the city are living in poverty. In Oil City, more than 80 percent of children under age 4 live in poverty. As the children go, so do their families. It is a significant issue in our whole diocese."

"We deal with families, but those families have children," Maxwell said. "We saw it at Christmas."

At St. Martin Center in Erie, the center's Shining Stars program which provides Christmas gifts for children had to lower the age of recipients from 16 to 12 because of increased requests. The center still provided gifts to 1,172 children yet received more calls.

"People come to an emergency site with a presenting problem, but that isn't the whole picture," Maxwell said. "We're looking at this more holistically than we ever have before. Instead of just giving someone a check to pay their gas bill, we'd really like to get them to meet with a caseworker."

Caseworkers and advocates are foundational to the way Catholic Charities is trying to tackle the poverty issue, she said. They can help with immediate needs but also make referrals.

See POVERTY, page 3

Catholic Schools Week

Jan. 29-Feb. 4



The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2012 is "Catholic Schools: Faith, Academics, Service." The annual observance starts the last Sunday in January and runs all week, which in 2012 is Jan. 29 to Feb. 5.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie will celebrate Catholic Schools Week with Masses, open houses and activities for students, families, parishioners and the community.

This year's theme focuses on three priorities that Catholic schools establish that make them stand out from other educational institutions. Children are taught faith – not just the basics of Christianity, but how to have a relationship with God. Academics help each child reach his or her potential. Service, the giving of one's time and effort to help others, is taught both as an expression of faith and good citizenship.

Catholic Schools Week is a joint project of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie follow the themes of faith, academics and service. As a recent service project, student council members at Our Lady's Christian School in Erie spearheaded a drive to collect items for those without shelter at the Warming Center at the Mental Health Association of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Student Council members (pictured left to right), Nick Carneval, Dominik Montefiori, Simon Mizner, Katie Diestman, Canyon Catalide and Mary Cardot, a volunteer of the Warming Center, pose with items that school students and families donated to benefit the homeless. In addition, students raised \$131 to assist the Warming Center in other ways.

Catholic Schools

Did You Know

Of the 566 students who graduated from the Diocese of Erie's seven Catholic high schools in 2011, 94.2 percent went on to attend a four-year college.

Source: Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Erie

A snapshot of Catholic schools

	Catholic schools in the U.S.*	Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Erie†
Total Catholic school enrollment:	2,065,872	7,319
Elementary school enrollment:	1,467,694	5,059
Secondary school enrollment:	598,178	2,206
Preschool enrollment:	Unavailable	1,175
Total number of schools:	6,980	40
Elementary schools:	5,774	30
Middle schools:	Unavailable	3
Secondary schools:	1,206	7
Elementary/middle school teachers:	102,365	393 (full time)
Secondary school teachers:	49,108	165 (full time)

* From 2010-11 school year, National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)
† From 2011-12 school year, Diocese of Erie's Catholic Schools Office



WASHINGTON – A group of students from the Diocese of Erie is pictured at the D.C. Army in Washington, D.C., for the 16th annual pro-life youth Mass Jan. 23. The group then joined hundreds of thousands of pro-lifers from around the nation at the 39th Annual March for Life and rally on the National Mall. The march is held

each year near the anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion.

Youth and adults from all points in the diocese arrived in Washington Jan. 22 and 23 by chartered buses to participate in the march and various activities including visiting with local representatives on Capitol Hill.

Catholic Rural Ministry welcomes new sister to Oil City Deanery

By Jason Koshinski
FaithLife editor

OIL CITY – As the newest member of Catholic Rural Ministry in the Oil City Deanery, Sister Tina Geiger, RSM, knows she's in the right place.

"It's always been in my heart to be with people in parish ministry," Sister Tina said.

This month, Sister Tina joined as a ministry partner with Sister Marian Wehler, OSB, in Catholic Rural Ministry. The ministry in the Oil City Deanery serves 18 parishes in Clarion, Venango, Crawford and Forest counties. The ministry position became open in November when Sister Clare Marie Bechner, SSI, was elected treasurer of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Catholic Rural Ministry provides pastoral care through home visits,

community retreats, spiritual workshops and youth activities and helps meet the human and social needs of the parish community. Catholic Rural Ministry is affiliated with Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Erie.

A native of Northern New Jersey, Sister Tina is a Sister of Mercy from Rhode Island who has studied at Mercyhurst College and lived with Sister Sisters in Erie. Most recently she has worked at Bethany Retreat Center in Frenchville creating a contemplative art program.

"It's just in my heart to be in a rural area where people might not be otherwise served," Sister Tina said. "Frenchville was a wonderful introduction to the culture of this area."

In the Diocese of Providence, R.I., Sister Tina served in parish ministries as a director of religious education and as a high school religious education teacher. She worked for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas regarding social justice and international issues such as human trafficking. There she became familiar with the Sisters of Mercy in Erie.

As an educator and youth leader, she brought students to Young People Who Care in Frenchville for ser-

vice trips. As a presenter for the *Why Catholic?* program, Sister Tina traveled the diocese giving retreats and workshops.

"I fell in love with the area and I prayed that God would open something up so I could minister here," she said. "The welcome has been wonderful."

Sister Tina recently visited St. Patrick School in Franklin and has already planned several youth retreats for the upcoming Lenten season.

"It's such a wonderful fit for me," she said. "Everybody's connecting with God."

Sister Tina said she is looking forward to being a Catholic presence at area prisons and nursing homes along with helping in a number of social service aspects.

Now in its fifth year, Catholic Rural Ministry in the Oil City Deanery has been widely successful in providing pastoral outreach and spiritual support and responsive to the social needs of the area. Catholic Rural Ministry has also had a presence in McKean and Potter counties in the diocese's Bradford Deanery since 1999.



Sister Tina Geiger, RSM

IN THE U.S.

■ **Philly school mergers, closures signal new model of Catholic education**

If the recommendations of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Blue Ribbon Commission are fully implemented, 45 of the 156 mostly parish-based elementary schools will cease to exist at the end of the present school year as will four of 17 archdiocesan high schools. In the case of the high schools it is an outright closing, with the students free to choose any other existing high school. Technically the elementary schools are not closing. They are combining with one or more other schools at another location to form an entirely new school.



Archbishop Charles Chaput

In a letter sent to all parents and guardians, Archbishop Charles Chaput wrote of the trends that are impacting Catholic education in the archdiocese — declining baptisms, an increase in charter schools and the rising cost of education, which have resulted in higher tuition costs for parents and heavy operating deficits for schools. Because of this, many of the affected schools were forced to eliminate such programs as art, music, foreign language, library, physical education and technology, among others.

■ **Texas bishops applaud court decision to uphold sonogram law**

Texas Catholic bishops applauded the Jan. 11 decision of the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals allowing the state to enforce a sonogram law requiring abortion providers to offer women the opportunity to view the ultrasound images of their unborn children.

The ruling by a three-judge panel of the appeals court ruling overturned a U.S. District Court judge's temporary injunction against enforcing the measure that requires doctors who perform abortions to show sonograms to patients, and describe the images and fetal heartbeat. The state's bishops made the sonogram law a high priority during the previous legislative session because they said it would help mothers recognize the humanity of their unborn children and choose life.

■ **Avoiding damage for poor likely to be '12 focus of Washington advocates**

With election-year politics pretty much guaranteed to clog up the process of passing legislation this year even more than partisan posturing did in 2011, Washington wish lists for policy and legislation are brief and heavy on defensive thinking. Retaining funding for crucial international aid programs, preventing drastic cuts to the domestic poverty safety net, extending the availability of unemployment insurance and fostering a measured approach to international hot spots including Iran, Syria and North Korea are as ambitious as gets for the legislative and policy agenda of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and some other advocacy organizations.

For example, high on the list is fighting for the continuation of unem-

ployment insurance. Congress included a two-month extension just before Christmas in a bill that also temporarily extended the payroll tax cut. While the bill didn't expand the number of weeks one may claim unemployment insurance benefits beyond the current 99-week maximum, it did head off a return to a 26-week maximum that existed before Congress approved a series of extensions. Keeping those extra weeks available will be considered crucial to easing the plight of the unemployed while the economy continues to recover.



Kathy Saille, director of domestic social development for the USCCB, said her staff will be working to protect that unemployment extension and watching out for other efforts to cut funding to other safety net programs and those that help poor and vulnerable people.

■ **Three-year study of women religious completed; Vatican views results**

A three-year study of the nearly 400 congregations of women religious in the U.S. called for by the Vatican has been completed with the final comprehensive report recently sent to Rome. No details of the findings in what the church calls an apostolic visitation were released by Mother Mary Clare Milia, superior general of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the apostolic visitor appointed by the Vatican to undertake the study. Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life is now studying them. He said the congregation is expected "to make known its evaluation of the results of the visit" at some future date.



AROUND THE WORLD

■ **Pope prays for migrants, refugees seeking a better life**

The millions of refugees and migrants in the world are not numbers but people in search of a better life for themselves and their families, Pope Benedict XVI said. "They are men and women, young and old, who are looking for a place they can live in peace," the pope said Jan. 15, which the Vatican marked as the World Day for Migrants and Refugees. The pope welcomed migrants living in Rome to his recitation of the Angelus in St. Peter's Square and told the thousands of people gathered for the midday prayer that migrants and refugees are not only recipients of the church's outreach, but also can be agents of evangelization in their new communities.

By the Way...

Happy Catholic Schools Week! This week is an opportunity to celebrate the many good things—faith, academics and service—going on at Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie. Bishop Donald Trautman will celebrate a school Mass at 9:30 a.m. Jan. 30 at Kennedy Catholic High School in Hermitage for the entire student body (K-12) of the new Shenango Valley Catholic School System.



Jason Koshinski

A couple parishes in the diocese are getting ready to celebrate milestone anniversaries. St. Patrick Parish in Erie turns 175 this year. An anniversary Mass with Bishop Trautman is scheduled for 5 p.m. June 16.

Msgr. Henry Kriegl, pastor of St. Patrick, has written a book on the parish's history, "St. Patrick's Parish 1837-2012—175 Years Serving Erie's East Bayfront Community." The book is available by calling the parish at 814.454.8085. Cost is \$20 for the book, \$25 if it is mailed. More than 250 copies have already been sold.

As part of the anniversary celebration, a renovation of the church is planned which will begin in mid-August.

Holy Redeemer Parish in Warren will officially celebrate its 100th anniversary Aug. 11 at 5:15 p.m. with a Mass with Bishop Trautman.

Each month from Aug. 2011 to Aug. 2012, the parish is organizing some type of activity as part of its anniversary celebration. On Feb. 27 at 7 p.m., the parish will present "I Thirst," a concert performance by artist Tajci.

Tajci, who came to Warren and Erie in October 2010, will also be performing at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Erie at 3 p.m. Feb. 26.

Jackie Francois, a singer, songwriter, guitarist, speaker and youth minister from Placentia, Calif., will be returning to the diocese. Francois will perform at 7 p.m. Feb. 4 at Mercyhurst College's Christ the King Chapel. The performance is part of a Catholic campus ministry intercollegiate gathering.

She will also appear at The Crossing Coffeehouse in Warren Feb. 2 and speak with students at St. Joseph School in Warren Feb. 3.

Francois was the keynote speaker at the diocese's 2011 middle school youth rally, which was held at St. Joseph in Warren.

Erie's CYAMs (Catholic Young Adult Ministry) is calling all young adults for Mass and fellowship. Join fellow Catholic young adults age 21-39 for Mass & Mingling. Each month a parish in the Erie area will host Mass followed by coffee and donuts.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Erie hosted the first gathering Jan. 29. The next one is scheduled for 11 a.m. Feb. 26 at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Harborcreek. For a complete schedule or more information on CYAM, visit www.cyamerie.wordpress.com.

Jason Koshinski is editor of FaithLife. Contact him at JKoshinski@ErieCD.org or 814.824.1171.

HHS delays, but does not change, rule on contraceptive coverage

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Although Catholic leaders vowed to fight on, the Obama administration has turned down repeated requests from Catholic bishops, hospitals, schools and charitable organizations to revise its religious exemption to the requirement that all health plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge.

Instead, Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced Jan. 20 that nonprofit groups that do not provide contraceptive coverage because of their religious beliefs will get an additional year "to adapt to this new rule."

"This decision was made after very careful consideration, including the important concerns some have raised about religious liberty," Sebelius said. "I believe this proposal strikes the appropriate balance between respecting religious freedom and increasing access to important preventive services."

But Cardinal-designate Timo-

thy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the Obama administration had "drawn an unprecedented line in the sand" with the decision.

"The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation," he added. "We will continue to study all the implications of this troubling decision."

Sebelius announced the mandate and a narrow religious exemption to it Aug. 1, 2011. Under the plan, after Aug. 1 of this year, new or significantly altered health plans will be required to provide all FDA-approved contraceptives, including some that can cause abortions without co-pays or deductibles as part of preventive health care for women.

The only religious organiza-



"In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences."

— Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, president of the USCCB on the HHS announcement.

(4) is a nonprofit organization" under specific sections of the Internal Revenue Code.

Those sections "refer to churches, their integrated auxiliaries, and conventions or associations of churches, as well as to the exclusively religious activities of any religious orders," according to a footnote to the interim final rule.

Catholic groups, including the USCCB, the Catholic Health Association and Catholic Charities USA, called that exemption too

narrow, saying it would require Catholic groups to stop all services to those who were not Catholic and would inappropriately involve the government in decisions about whether an organization is "religious enough" to be exempted.

Sebelius' announcement brought an outcry from Catholic leaders and a sign of relief from groups such as Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America, which had opposed any moves to weaken the contrac-

tive mandate or strengthen the religious exemption.

In a video posted on the USCCB website, Cardinal-designate Dolan said the decision put the Obama administration "on the wrong side of the Constitution" and should be rescinded.

"In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences," the cardinal-designate said in a separate statement. "To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their health care is literally unconscionable. It is as much an attack on access to health care as on religious freedom. Historically this represents a challenge and a compromise of our religious liberty."

Franiscan Sister Jane Marie Klein, who chairs the board at Franciscan Alliance, a system of 13 Catholic hospitals, characterized the decision as "nothing else than a direct attack on religion

and First Amendment rights."

Sister Carol Keehan, a Daughter of Charity who is president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association, said the announcement was a "missed opportunity to be clear on appropriate conscience protection."

"The challenge that these regulations posed for many groups remains unresolved," she added. "This indicates the need for an effective national conversation on the appropriate conscience protections in our pluralistic country, which has always respected the role of religions."

Father Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, said he was "extremely disappointed" that the administration chose to ignore calls from religious institutions to broaden the exemption.

"With the existing restrictive definition in this mandate, the ministry of Jesus Christ himself would not be considered a religious entity," he said.

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Briefly

Mercyhurst to host intercollegiate gathering

ERIE — Mercyhurst College Campus Ministry will welcome 100 students from seven area colleges and universities for the Diocese of Erie's intercollegiate gathering on Saturday, Feb. 4.

The annual day of faith, fellowship and fun includes participants from Mercyhurst Erie and North East, Gannon, Penn State Behrend, Edinboro, Allegheny, Clarion and Grove City. Participants will gather in Mercy Heritage Room of Sullivan Hall at 8:30 a.m. for the day's activities, which will conclude with a vigil Mass in Christ the King Chapel.

The day includes workshops, prayer and liturgy and a number of speakers, including Msgr. Patrick Keleher from Buffalo and Catholic singer-songwriter Jackie Francois. Francois will give a free performance at 7 p.m. in the chapel.

All are welcome. Call 814.824.2301 for more.



Jackie Francois

Mercer County pro-life breakfast

HERMITAGE — Pro-Life of Mercer County will hold its 10th annual breakfast at 9 a.m. Feb. 4 at the Hickory VFW Banquet Center, 5550 E. State St., east of the Hermitage central business district on Route 62.

The keynote speaker is Janet Folger Porter, president and founder of Faith in Action. As the legislative director of Ohio Right to Life, Porter successfully lobbied for passage of the nation's first partial-birth abortion ban and other critical pro-life legislation.

The recently retired president judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Mercer County, the Hon. Francis J. Fornelli, will be honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$5 for children age 12 and under.

For more information or to purchase tickets, call Kathy Jack at 724.264.4439 or Joan Walker at 724.962.1402.



Janet Folger Porter

Teachings about divorce, annulments

ERIE — Deacon Richard Shewman, D.Min., JCL, a judge on the diocesan marriage tribunal, will present "Teachings about divorce, annulments, life after divorce" at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. Feb. 12 at St. Luke Parish in Erie.

The presentation will discuss Chapter 19 of the Gospel of Matthew and the church's teachings on marriage, divorce and annulments—what they are and what they aren't.

The process of obtaining an annulment will also be discussed. Any personal issues on marriage and divorce that you would like to ask or be addressed are welcomed following the presentation.



Deacon Richard Shewman

TEC retreat

ERIE — TEC (To Encounter Christ) is a three-day encounter with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the context of community. It begins on a Friday at 10 a.m. and ends on a Sunday at 6 p.m. (see link below for schedule) for those who have at least completed their sophomore year of high school to adults.

The next TEC retreat will be held Feb. 17-19 at St. Joseph Parish/Bread of Life Community's community center, 147 W. 24th St. in Erie.

For a TEC application, visit www.onthevine.us. For more information, contact TEC co-directors Stacia Brown at 814.456.5371 or Dawn SchAAF at 814.835.8110.

Engagement Encounter

ERIE — Planning your wedding in 2012? An Engagement Encounter is scheduled for Feb. 25-27 at St. Mark Catholic Center in Erie.

Engagement Encounter satisfies diocesan requirements for marriage preparation. Catholic and interfaith couples are encouraged to attend.

Contact the Family Life Office at 814.824.1261 or visit www.ErieRCD.org/familylifeoffice.asp to register.

Tajci concerts in Erie, Warren

Singer/songwriter Tajci will return to the Diocese of Erie for two concerts.

Tajci will perform "I Thirst—the Crucifixion Story" Sunday, Feb. 26 at 3 p.m. at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Erie and Monday, Feb. 27 at 7 p.m. at Holy Redeemer Parish in Warren.

"I Thirst" presents the Way of the Cross through music.

A pop superstar in Communist Central Europe as a teen, Tajci abandoned her career at age 21, coming to the United States to become a student. Today, her Christian concerts inspire hope, healing and unity.

For more information on Tajci, visit www.idobelieve.com.



Tajci

Retrouvaille weekend for troubled marriages

ERIE — Retrouvaille is a weekend experience for couples who are experiencing difficulty in their marriage. Held in complete confidentiality and privacy, Retrouvaille is designed for couples who need help strengthening a marriage that no longer feels life-giving.

Following the completion of the Retrouvaille weekend, couples are encouraged to attend follow-up sessions to strengthen and re-new their marriage.

The next Retrouvaille weekend is scheduled for March 2-4 in Erie. For more information, call 814.437.9377 or visit www.retrouvaille.org.

Retrouvaille is sponsored by Catholic Charities.

Natural Family Planning

Natural Family Planning is the practice of achieving or postponing pregnancy by observing and recording a few simple observable fertility signs.

The Office of Natural Family Planning and Chastity Education is sponsoring a series of classes throughout the diocese. NFP is a chemical-free, inexpensive and easy to learn. Class sessions are taught once a month for three consecutive months.

To see the full schedule through June, including future sessions and locations, visit www.ErieRCD.org/nfp.asp.

■ St. Marys — Classes start Sunday, Jan. 29 from 6-8 p.m. at St. Mary Parish church annex. Call Cathy at 814.834.6208.

■ Erie — Classes start Thursday, Feb. 16 from 7-9 p.m. at Our Lady of Peace Parish. Call Gretchen at 814.866.3008.

■ DuBois — Classes start Tuesday, Feb. 21 from 7-9 p.m. at instructors' home. Call Judy at 814.371.5852.

Church, Catholic Charities trying to meet increasing needs

POVERTY from page 1

"We don't do everything," Maxwell said. "We're diversifying as much as possible so we are addressing more of the major poverty problems than ever before."

But there is a litany of issues and needs that Catholic Charities addresses: Food assistance, housing, clothing, unemployment, mental health, utilities, pregnancy and prenatal care, job training, budget counseling, debt management, computer skills and refugee assistance.

"We're not just a food pantry," Maxwell said. "We're helping people build on their strengths. We're trying to direct them toward self sufficiency. That's the big picture of what we're trying to do. But it takes time."

Joe Flecher, director of the Prince of Peace Center in Farrell, said his agency takes a total approach to tackling poverty. But funding issues have made it more difficult. Government cuts of \$30,000 in lost FEMA funds and food assistance funds have left a huge hole in the center's budget. Catholic Charities replaced \$7,000 of those funds with proceeds from the Catholic Charities Ball and Operation Rice Bowl.

"Losing the money was a big hit, but Catholic Charities really stepped up to help us," Flecher said. Prince of Peace serves approximately 700 families each month with food assistance including 300 elderly. The center's soup kitchen is open twice a week. Utility assistance and the request for items from center's thrift store are also in high demand.

"Part of it is if you're having a food crisis, you might be having trouble in other areas as well," Flecher said. "More people are coming to us regularly or sheepishly for the first time that have lost work."

The center's programs, such as AWESOME (Assistance With Education, Shelter, Organization, Money management and Employment), offer classes to those

who are ready and willing to take the next step in self-sufficiency, Flecher said.

HOPE (Help and Opportunity for Personal Empowerment) Advocacy provides an opportunity to learn basic life skills and family stability through case management and monthly support groups. Project RUTH (Resources, Training and Homes) provides housing and works with homeless individuals to provide long-term support and skill-building opportunities.

But the needs are still great. The thrift store, which offers donated items such as clothing at reduced prices, also provides furniture, appliances and other necessities to those in need at no cost. The store typically operates at a loss each year as part of its service, Flecher said. This year the store is expected to lose \$50,000, he said.

"We're helping people who are interested in changing their lives," Flecher said. "It's an extension of our faith. We're here to serve."

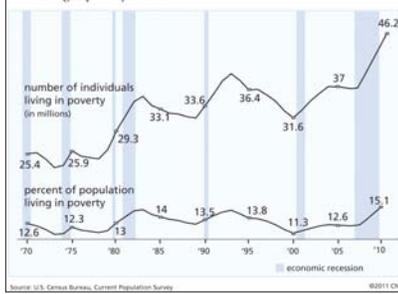
St. Martin Center has five caseworkers in social services and eight full-time staffers in its housing department, and they're all busy, said Cheryl Kobel, executive director.

The reasons why people don't have money are changing, Kobel said. People are in need of food because they're using their money to pay higher utility and medical prescription fees.

"They're paying more out of pocket," Kobel said. "Employees are expected to pay more into their insurance coverage. Co-pays and employee contributions are going up. Employers can't handle the expense so they're passing it on to their employees. It's a trickle-down effect."

The numbers in need of hous-

A RECORD 46.2 MILLION PEOPLE — just more than 15 percent — were living in poverty in 2010.



ing assistance remain constant, she said, with a slight increase in home foreclosures.

"We're still working with hundreds of families facing foreclosure," she said. "We're having some successes with the lenders that are very generous. But it's still difficult."

For people who come in once or twice a year, St. Martin Center is able to track them for up to six months to a year to see how they're doing.

"We're seeing success," Kobel said.

But the center is noticing new trends such as the increase in the number of people attending the Bishop's Breakfast Program, which provides a hot meal weekday mornings in downtown Erie. Once a month caseworkers visit the site to discuss the immediate needs of those receiving the breakfast.

"We're seeing women and children, people coming with families now," Kobel said. "They'll go to the City Mission for lunch and Emmaus (soup kitchen) for dinner."

Through Catholic Rural Ministry, Sister Phyllis Schleicher, OSB, and Sister Mary Hoffman, OSB, have been providing pastoral care to the people of McKean and Potter counties since 1999. It's not unusual for them to receive several calls each week from people that need help with a utility bill or a prescription.

"They're trying to get themselves back on their feet," Sister Mary said.

Parish food pantries in the area are particularly busy, she said.

"With job losses, an increasing trend is seeing multiple families—two, three and sometimes four generations—living together. "Employment opportunities here are somewhat limited," Sister Phyllis said.

Sister Phyllis serves on Potter County's Emergency Food and Shelter Programs and said she is able to coordinate a lot of the needs she sees with human services.

The work the sisters do is assisted by Catholic Charities and donations from residents of the local areas.

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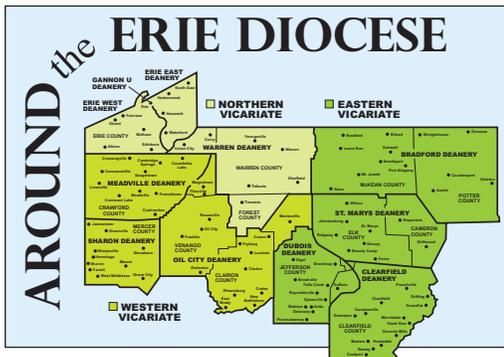
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Photo Tips

Quick, important tips for taking good digital pictures. <http://www.ErieRCD.org/faithlife.asp>



DuBois students brighten Christmas for Christ the King residents

DUBOIS – The fifth graders at DuBois Central Catholic Elementary School decorated a tree in the school lobby with homemade sock snowmen as part of a Christmas service project. The students dedicated it to their collection of small gifts for the residents of Christ the King Manor in DuBois.

All gifts were donated by the fifth grade families. The students also crafted homemade cards for the residents.

Pictured left to right: (first row) Aliya Singleton, Paige Dushac, Lexie Szyplowski, Paige Stroka, Emma Cooper, Ethan Stoddard, Hunter Benton, (second row) Jacob Snyder, Caleb Elias, (third row) Justin Miknis, Antonio Willar, Amber Brocius, Ash-



ley Wruble, Sherry Anderson, Alyssa Bittner, Ashley Mayes (fourth row) Carley Semanck, and Zach Vandervort.

OLMC Advent project benefits Toys for Tots, Humane Society

ERIE – The fourth grade religious education students at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Erie, under the direction of their teacher Cori Ochalek, recently held a bake sale at Sam's Club in Erie as part of their Advent service project.

The bake sale raised \$552. Splitting the funds, each student received \$36 to go shopping but not for themselves. They either bought toys for Toys for Tots or pet supplies for the local Humane Society.

Students are pictured with toys they purchased for the Toys for Tots program.



Operation Christmas Child at OLMC School

ERIE – Students in grades 3-4 at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Erie recently participated in Operation Christmas Child. Students were each given a shoe box and asked to decorate it. They filled the boxes with various items such as pens, pencils, crayons and coloring books for children ages 8 to 10. Pictured are OLMC students with their finished gifts.

The boxes were distributed worldwide through Operation Christmas Child. Last year, 82 million shoe boxes were delivered to children living in places like earthquake-devastated Haiti and war-scarred Sudan.



Operation Christmas Child was introduced to Our Lady of Mount Carmel by school nurse Kathy Schriefer.

St. Marys students help the Giving Tree

ST. MARYS – The Giving Tree is a Christmas tradition at St. Marys churches and schools.

St. Marys Catholic Elementary School Kindergarten students Alexander Chileski, Sarah Haselman, Samantha Straub and Anthony Dellaquila are shown displaying the gifts their classes collected for the Giving Tree, which involves gifting the less fortunate with presents at Christmas-time.

The students are pictured with Giving Tree coordinator Mary Ann McCluskey.



St. George Christmas Store benefits refugees

ERIE – Deacon John Brophy and Lisa Ripper of Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Program stand with St. George School principal Larry Neubauer alongside the school's donation to help refugee families in Erie.

The donation included home décor items and men's and women's gloves and scarves left over from the school's annual Christmas Store. The 2011 Christmas Store, the largest independent fundraiser for the school's parent-teacher organization, was coordinated by parent volunteers Julie Corst and Dynelle Smith.



St. Luke Advent project brightens season

ERIE – During the first week of Advent, students from St. Luke School in Erie drew placemats for the residents of the Presbyterian Lodge, Saint Mary's East and Veterans Affairs Medical Center. The placemats were to be used during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Pictured from left to right are Ryan Wieser, Lillian Drabic, Maddie Hilling and Amanda Costello.



Sacred Heart children observe Christmas

ST. MARYS – The children of Sacred Heart Parish in St. Marys observed the birth of Jesus in a special way at the 11 a.m. Christmas Day Mass.

For the homily, Father Eric Vogt, OSB, invited all the children to sit at the foot of the altar while he read "Room for a Little One" by Martin Waddell. At the offertory, the children carried wrapped baby gifts for the Christ child to a living nativity scene at the foot of the altar. Many other parishioners joined in the procession of gifts with their young children bearing gifts for the Christ child while Lydia Gibson played and sang "O Come Little Children."

At the end of Mass, the children came forward to sing "Happy Birthday" to baby Jesus.

The procession included several children as angels: Elizabeth Anderson, Audrey Dornish



Gina Antonelli, Hope Farley, Lauren Rakieski, Sydney O'Leary, Sophia Radkowski, Sean Radkowski and Rudy Bish. Mary and Joseph were portrayed by Brandi Clyde and Timothy Dollinger and Erik Rakieski and Braydon Clyde served as shepherds. All baby gifts will be distributed through the Maternity Closet, a local pro-life effort.

St. Timothy Christmas trees help Relay for Life

CURWENSVILLE – The religious education classes at St. Timothy Parish in Curwensville decorated Christmas trees as part of a contest to raise money for the parish Relay for Life team.

Classes, either individually or in conjunction with another grade, designed and decorated a tree and in some cases made the decorations. The trees were displayed in the gathering space and parishioners were asked to vote on their favorite tree by placing money in a can at the base of each tree.

The winning tree was from grades 4-5 (teachers Doe Augustine and Ronda Hamilton).

Pictured left to right are the Christmas trees from grade 8, grades 9-10, grades 4-5 and grades 2-3.



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