

# Parishes help families get ready for school

written by Tara Little |



On the morning of Aug. 7, volunteers Laura Beth Wortman and Gayle Priddy loaded Leandra Bluefer down with five backpacks full of school supplies. Bluefer was one of many parents at Helping Hand of Greater Little Rock, who had come to benefit from the nonprofit agency's Food for the Minds program. Her five children, ages 5 to 10, attend Little Rock public schools. Wortman, 12, is a seventh grader at Christ the King School in Little Rock. She was working to fulfill service hours needed for confirmation, while Priddy, a member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Marche, is a volunteer at the inner-city food pantry four days a week. From Aug. 7-10, low-income families were invited to pick up school supplies for their children through the Food for the Minds program. Helping Hand director Bruce Limozaine said his agency works with United Way of Pulaski County to serve children in kindergarten through sixth grade in three school districts: Little Rock, North Little Rock and Pulaski County. The primary contributors to the program are the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in St. Louis and the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock. The Daughters of Charity provide a grant to purchase school supplies, while the cathedral donates additional supplies through its School Tools Project. Other donors of school supplies included Our Lady of the Holy Souls, St. Edward and Christ the King churches in Little Rock. Cathedral Deacon B.J. Bowen made his fourth delivery of school supplies in two weeks to Helping Hand on Aug. 7. Bowen is also vice president of United Way. Bowen said he collected donations at the cathedral at all Masses the weekends of July 29-30 and Aug. 5-6. This was the fourth year the parish donated school supplies through a program that Bowen developed. He said he saw the need for School Tools after working with Helping Hand to assist low-income families get school supplies for their children. For the past five years, through his job at United Way, Bowen has worked with public schools to identify children who could benefit from the Helping Hand program. Public school children who qualify for the free or subsidized federal school lunch programs are eligible for free school supplies at Helping Hand. Bowen said he realized four years ago that the grant provided to Helping Hand to purchase school supplies was not enough so he created School Tools so his parish could help serve more

children.

This year 600 children will benefit from the supplies given to Helping Hand.

By noon Aug. 7, Helping Hand had already run out of backpacks. Though the school supplies program ended officially Aug. 10, Helping Hand's director said the agency welcomes continued donations of much-needed backpacks.

Donations may be dropped off at Helping Hand of Greater Little Rock Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at 1601 Marshall St., Little Rock. For more information, call (501) 372-7257.