

Angel Trees help parishes spread love around Hot Springs

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Christmas spirit

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HOT SPRINGS — Christmas is a time for giving and members of Hot Springs parishes are making sure that about 200 children and their families are not forgotten.

In many parishes Angel Trees are decorated with cards that provide the ages and needs of the children in the area. Parishioners pull the cards off of the tree and find gifts for individual children. The wrapped or unwrapped gifts are returned to the parish for distribution before Christmas.

St. John the Baptist and St. Mary of the Springs churches are examples of how different parishes can decide who to help.

“We want to help every child and their families that we can,” said Phyllis Baltz, coordinator of

the team of people who run the program at St. Mary. "We try to meet the needs of the kids. If they need a coat or a shirt or some other type of gift. We had a child that asked only for a pillow."

St. John Parish provides clothing and gifts for about 70 children and their families. The children attend the church or St. John School.

"We focus on our parish families," said Shelly Dvorak, coordinator of the program, said. "We work with the parents. They normally ask for clothing and a toy."

The families are notified once the gifts are delivered to the parish office so they can pick them up. The parish also provides food baskets, which each include canned goods and a ham, for 29 families to be picked up Dec. 22.

The Angel Tree program at St. Mary is run differently than the program at St. John since they provide gifts and food for children and parish families as well 100 children in need who attend Hot Springs public schools.

The tree inside St. Mary vestibule could not handle the bulk of the toys and most had to be stored elsewhere. There are more than 30 children who are parish members and their families and people who are shut in that receive food and gifts from the parish.

On Dec. 11, a group of helpers loaded up the packages at St. Mary into a truck and trailer driven by Travis Sorrows and the gifts for about 100 children were delivered to the Hot Springs School District administration building. Baltz said she identified a need that the parish could provide for children outside the parish.

Becky Rosburg, Hot Springs assistant superintendent, said school counselors identify which students need the service. They will collect the information on the students from their families so she can forward that information to Baltz.

Rosburg said there is a grandmother who cares for five children who are provided gifts from the Angel Tree program.

"There is no way she could provide Christmas for them," Rosburg said. "We have a lot of students who are in need and their families don't have the means for them to have Christmas. It is a blessing for us to have St. Mary's."