

Banners bid a warm welcome to early arrivers for Mass. At right, Brian Jennings rounds out a busy day with a nap in Cliff St. Pierre's lap.



Retreats that Build Families in Christ

Text and Photos By Susan McKinney

A fresh insight into religion and family life was offered 150 participants in the family renewal retreat held last week at Camp Stella Maris.

The retreat was one of a series of three week-long sessions which drew about 21 families each to the diocesan campgrounds.

The popularity of the program has grown steadily since it started three years ago, and now has a waiting list of prospective retreatants.

Father Robert Hammond, the groups' spiritual director, said that the sessions are "based on the family unit and God. A commune is formed. People learn what it means to be a family." He said the goal of the

program is to "build families in Christ and to show children that the faith and religion which we talk about all year are a real thing, an important thing in our lives."

Terry Holly noticed a change in his children's behavior during the retreat. "The ones who were really reluctant to come this year are the same ones who are making plans for when they come back again next year," he said.

Andy Gutacker had but a single regret, "wish they had something like this when I had all eight kids at home."

While standard camp activities are available for the retreatants, the greatest experience for them appeared to be the warmth of their community.

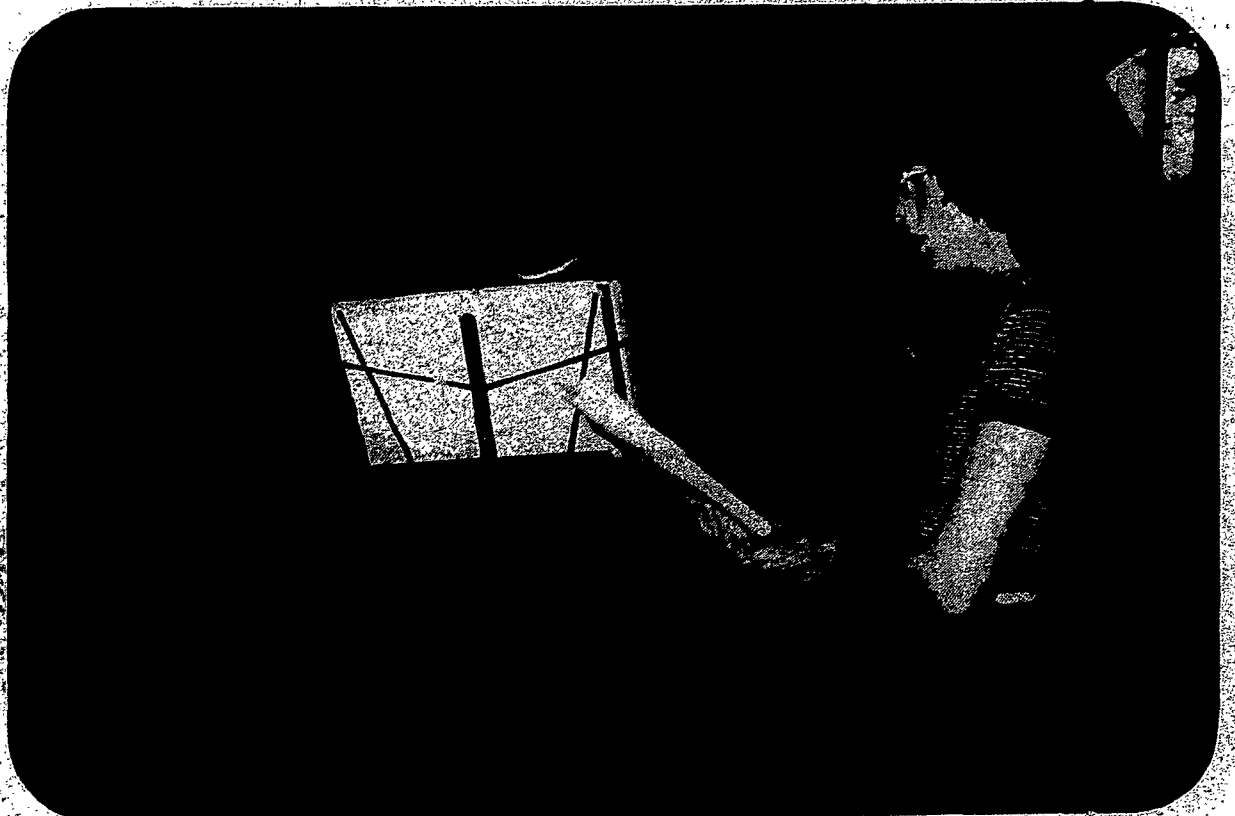
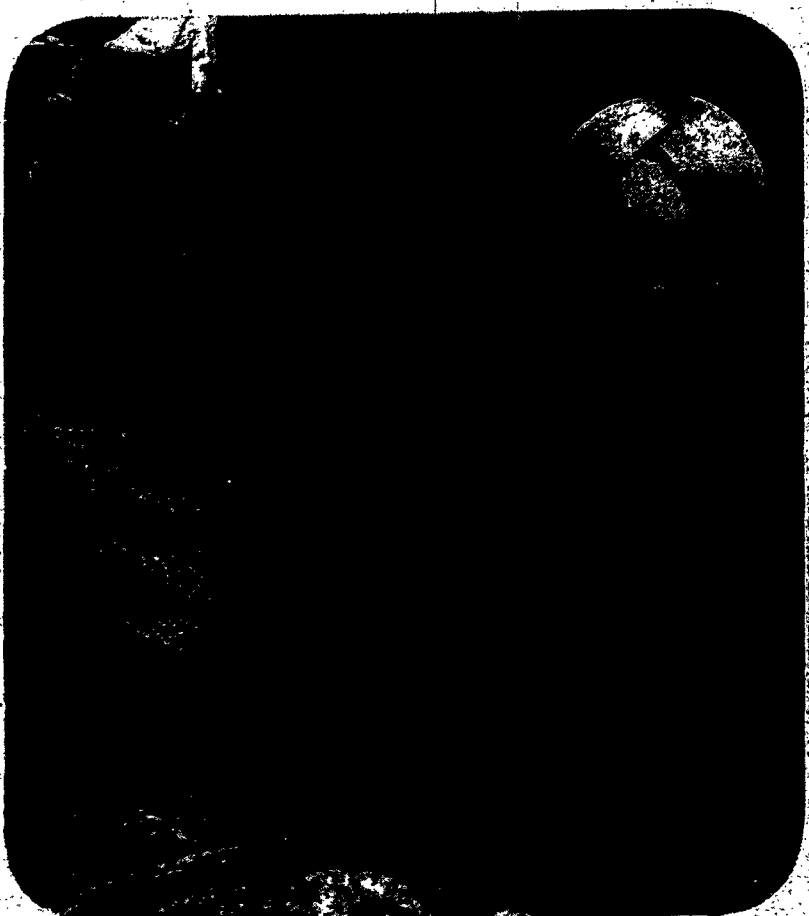
This was most strikingly in evidence

during their afternoon Masses where campers brought the chapel to life, under home-made banners, as they wished each other the fellowship and peace of Christ.

Twenty-five teen-age volunteers make up the major part of the camp's staff for the retreats. Father Hammond noted that although each retreat week uses different volunteers there is never any shortage of help.

Rounding out the staff are seminarians who serve as counsellors, keep an eye on youngsters and initiate activities to get everyone involved in camp life.

The retreatants all spoke enthusiastically of the sense of family closeness, community-sharing, mutual concern and lived religion which they experienced.



Danny Davison, at left, reassures Katie Fleisher on the dinner menu. Above, Kathy Mahone, Pete Clifford, Robb Daniel, Dan Condon and Mary Ellen Orgle furnished music during the Mass.