

Parents Will Become Primary Teachers

By PAT PETRASKE

Trooping back to school this fall will be not only youngsters but parents. Religious educators aim to reach the adults "not in the narrow frame of doctrine and dogma" but in an attempt to generate and determine what values touch adult life," according to Sister Michael Lappetito, director of religious education.

The emphasis on renewed instruction for parents arises out of the view that parents are the primary teachers of their children. Sister Michael believes as religious education is brought more and more into the home, "it will make a good impact on family life."

The religious education department is attempting to break open patterns of learning and presents a wide range of resources to parishes for adult and youth education. To facilitate parish education, 72 of the 165 parishes in the diocese have religious education coordinators, 30 per cent of whom are lay people.

Few parishes retain the concept of "released time" where an hour is set aside each week for religious instruction during the school day. "Released time was usually an hour and that included transportation time. More parishes are using Saturday mornings or evenings during the week for classes," commented Pat Fox, president of the Association of Religious Educators (ARE) and the religious education coordinator at Christ the King parish.

Another emphasis of the religious education department is on the formation of education committees as standing committees in parish councils. They are a visible sign and an extension of what Jesus is doing," said Sister Michael. She explained that their responsibility was primarily "to see that good education is going on" and estimated that 80 per cent of the parishes have education committees.

To assist these committees this fall, two staff positions have been added to the diocesan department of education. A consultant for education committees will serve part time and will be responsible for the administration of services and training programs for the committees. Sister Michael hopes the position will be filled by Sept. 1.

A parish education organizer will assist in long-range planning and decision-making for the Catholic schools and the total parish religion program. The organizer is expected to be named by Aug. 26. In addition, Denise Mack will replace Rosalie Reinhardt as consultant for parish coordinators.

Total parish education is the basic goal of each education committee and the coordinator. Leonard Paganelli, coordinator at St. Paul's in Webster, has begun to adopt the "Green Bay Plan" which presents curriculum for all age levels from pre-schoolers to the elderly. The plan developed by the Diocese of Green Bay, Wis., unifies and integrates curriculum and basic themes covered on various grade levels," Paganelli said.

While programs and schedules may vary, most parishes divide religious education into six levels. Fox, at Christ the King, said the pre-school program for ages three to five begins with the basic concepts of prayer and God. Sacramental and scripture preparation is tackled by grades one through four. For First Penance and First Communion personal interviews are held with the parents and child.

Grades five and six use their classes for review of the sacraments and scripture,

especially the Old Testament. From there, they begin a two-year cycle in preparation for Confirmation. Parochial and public school children come together

for the preparation.

Fox admitted that a weak area in the program is on the high school level. One regular class for high schoolers is held each week,

but more students respond to the special events, such as speakers, a Day of Recollection and three-day trips. Excursions are planned to Philadelphia and Washington,

D.C. for a "Community Living Christian Weekend."

Adult education is usually handled through discussions and lectures in short courses.

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