

# Camping Program Ministers

By Martin Toombs



One inquisitive youngster kept track of what Father Thomas Bales was doing during Mass by watching under his arm. The children had circled the altar during Mass in the camp chapel.

To those working in the ministry to separated, divorced and widowed persons, it soon becomes evident that there is another need — that of ministry to the children of single parents.

Since the beginning of the divorced and separated Catholics groups in the diocese about four years ago, the groups have planned family outings and events with the children in mind.

And through the office of Sister Kathleen Kircher, diocesan director of ministry to the divorced and separated seminars have been given to help school teachers deal with children from one-parent homes in their classes.

And, during the past two summers, a Family Camp specifically for single parents and their children has been conducted at Camp Stella Maris, and a week has been reserved to repeat the program next year.

Before the camping session this year, Sister Kathleen was contacted by a reporter for Newsweek magazine, who was doing an article on help being offered children whose parents divorced. Sister Kathleen noted that the reporter had been contacting persons across the country, and the Rochester diocese's program was the first organized ministry to children she had found.

There are many myths surrounding divorce, and one of them was exploded at the camp. Members of a divorced family are often pictured as friendly and cooperative after the divorce is final. But a few of the parents at the camp brought court orders with them allowing them to bring their children, or were missing children they hadn't seen in months, as they were with the ex-spouse. "As long as you have children," Sister Kathleen noted, the divorce "is never completed."

This year about 130 parents and children attended the camp, coming from throughout the diocese.

Though many were strangers at the outset, by the last day, the atmosphere was that found among people who had known each other much longer. Participants spoke freely of their reactions to the week, as they progressed from apprehension to a feeling of security and a realization of the support each person was extended by the group.

Sister Kathleen noted that for some families, it was the first time since the divorce or the death of a parent that the parents and their children had had time just to play together.

The program included age-group sessions each morning, followed by family discussions. The afternoons were left for family recreation.

The children's sessions were conducted by Sister Cheryl Lee, who teaches first grade at St. John the Evangelist, Spencerport; Sister Marie Brown, religious



Joan McCall with hat, and her children and some friends outside the camp's main building.

Text by  
Martin Toombs

Photos by  
Patricia Haggerty



Father Bales and three of his fellow fishermen got to enjoy their catch for breakfast on the last day.