

# Are Churches Ready for Disabled Persons?

Last of a two-part series.

This push to bring the disabled into the mainstream of American life poses a challenge to the churches which have long proclaimed service to the sick as a gospel virtue but are sometimes reluctant to welcome into their congregations those who walk, talk or look "funny."

Commenting on the IYDP, "Notes," the publication of the National Catholic Educational Association, asks in its January 1981 issue: "Is the community ready and able to



Sister Maria Christina welcomes party-goers at Brockport's fiesta.

## Brockport Welcomes Hispanic Community

**Brockport** — More than 100 Spanish speaking residents of this area were feted at a special welcoming fiesta at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish last week.

The event was co-sponsored by the Spanish Apostolate Office and the Brockport Migrant Education Program and included a Spanish language Mass, a multi-ethnic pot luck supper and various recreational activities.

Concelebrating the Mass were Father John Podsiadlo, S.J. Spanish Apostolate Office; Father Nicholas Menjivar, Holy Redeemer Parish; and Father John Phillips, pastor of Nativity. The Spanish speaking participants were from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador and Costa Rica.

Nearly 100 Mexican

## Art Teacher to Study In Venice

Mary Lou Wenthe, art teacher at St. Agnes High School, has been accepted in an art program which will provide two summers of study in Venice, Italy. This summer, she will leave on June 25 and return Aug. 22.

Pursuing a master's degree in studio art, Miss Wenthe will spend a third summer at New York University, the sponsoring school.

In Venice, Miss Wenthe

## JUGGLING CLUB

The Rochester Juggling Club will meet from 1 to 4 p.m., Sunday, June 28, at St. Joseph's School Gym, 39 Gebhardt Road, Penfield.

families arrive each year from Saltillo, Mexico; Mission, Tx., and Florida. They work in the area from May until November with such crops as cabbage, tomatoes and cucumbers. The children study either in day or evening programs offered by the Brockport Migrant Education Program under the direction of Sister Beverly Baker, SSJ.

Following the Mass the congregation proceeded to the cafeteria of the Campus School where an overflowing buffet table had been prepared under the coordination of Sister Maria Christina Juarez, MGSps, who is active in a number of evangelization programs in migrant camps in the diocese.

Music for the day was provided by Pedro Nunez and the Mt. Carmel Choir, Angel Rivera and the Flamboyanes Singers, and Narcisco Villela and companions.

will study painting, sculpture and art history. At the end of the summer, she will exhibit representative pieces of her work in a group art show in Venice.

## Special Rosary Scheduled

A Rosary in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary has been scheduled at 7:30 p.m., Friday, June 26, the feast of the Sacred Heart, at the wooded area shrine at 237 Rye Road, Greece.

The shrine is dedicated to Jesus and Mary. Rye Road runs off Latona Road between Ridgeway Avenue and Ridge Road.

accept Ed (born deaf and retarded)? Are our ministers equipped to offer the necessary moral and psychological support to parents of handicapped children?

"Are our churches ready to integrate handicapped persons into their liturgical celebrations? Is the Catholic Church ready to assist Ed and other handicapped persons to cope with a non-institutional environment?"

"If the answer to these questions is no, then perhaps it would be unfair to remove Ed from the familiarity and security of the institution."

Efforts to integrate the "de-institutionalized" into worship bodies has caused problems in various denominations. For example, in Wichita, Kan., a special ministry to the mentally handicapped caused problems at St. Luke's Methodist Church because of its great success. Attendance of some 30 retarded persons made the regular worshippers uncomfortable and led to a vote to limit the number at each service. The couple who taught the religious class of retarded adults resigned in protest.

In El Cajon, Calif., a separate Church of the Disabled was founded which meets Sunday afternoon in an annex of a Methodist church. The minister is a polio victim.

In other cities churches have strongly supported initiatives in favor of the disabled. In Gastonia, N.C., Holy Trinity Lutheran Church won a court victory when neighbors objected to its efforts to establish a group home for five retarded adults.

Nationally, many denominations have developed religious education programs for the retarded or developmentally disabled as they are now often known. Most recently, the Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and Church of the Brethren bodies have set up a joint task force to explore ways to meet the needs of these people.

Several bodies are also promoting efforts to remove the architectural barriers that deprive the disabled of entry into churches. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church has mandated that all new church construction must be barrier-free. The church also makes grants of \$500 to congregations wishing to remodel older churches for access.

The American Lutheran Church Extension Fund has decided to limit low interest construction loans to buildings that are barrier-free.



The U.S. Catholic Conference is including activities for the disabled in its well-publicized Respect Life program, better known for its opposition to abortion.

As England's Cardinal Basil Hume recently told American Catholics, true ministry to the disabled has to go beyond installing access ramps, wider doorways and improving toilet facilities.

Such practical details, he said, need attention, but so do "the less tangible ones of improved awareness and understanding on the part of non-handicapped members." He added his hope that the IYDP would cause "a universal reappraisal of our approach to people with handicaps and a universal effort to integrate them in practical ways with the rest of the worshipping community."

"One World," magazine of the World Council of Churches, also stressed participation of the disabled in commenting on the IYDP.

"The health and wholeness of the congregation and the wider community require all the members to take part, including those who live on the edge of society.

"And if racism is considered a sin, then 'handicapism' is a sin. It is treating people according to limitation rather than accepting them as children of God, as whole human beings made in God's image."

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