

Fordham professor urges principals to 'illuminate the ordinary' with vision

By Teresa A. Parsons
Lest Catholic school principals ever doubt the importance of their ministry, Father Robert Starratt, SJ, last week reminded them that every day in their schools, children are deciding whether to live or die.

"They're asking 'Is the world trustworthy? Does anybody care for me? Is it worth it to work hard? Am I loveable? Is the world arbitrary? Do I have anything to offer?'" Father Starratt said. "Depending on the answer, they will either withdraw or begin to trust ... to enjoy sharing with people and see the world as a good place."

Father Starratt, director of Fordham University's Center for Non-Public Education, spoke to Catholic school principals from around the diocese during their annual three-day retreat at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua. His topic was how to imbue a school's daily routine with a vision of Catholic education.

"That vision should illuminate the ordinary with dramatic significance," Father Starratt said. Although the vision may vary from school to school, the common element is an atmosphere that encourages children and teachers alike to choose life.

"A school is a culture, or a subculture if you will," he explained. "The way things are done and dealt with, how decisions are made should reflect the school's vision."

Ideally, a principal's role should be to articulate and perpetuate the vision in all the structures and activities of the school, to be a leader rather than an administrator. Father Starratt defined the difference as a contrast between "what is vs. what can be."

Whereas an administrator is an enforcer and protector of process and structure, a

leader invites the school population to define the significance of what they do together — the vision. Then he or she transforms structures and processes accordingly.

Job descriptions were one of Father Starratt's examples. "The real question is 'Are we getting the job done?' regardless of job titles — whether that means you're down in the basement with a wrench fixing the boiler ... or if it means sitting in the back row and letting someone else run the faculty meeting," he said. "It's a spiritual leadership, an apostolic leadership, a gospel leadership. Insofar as you nurture that spirituality, your leadership will continue to be alive and growing."

The diocesan Division of Education sponsored the retreat and Father Starratt's visit. A graduate of Boston College, Harvard University, Weston College and the University of Illinois, Father Starratt has earned bachelor's and master's degrees in philosophy, a master's and doctorate in education, and a master of divinity degree. At Fordham, he coordinates a doctoral program in church leadership, a master's program in non-public school administration and an annual conference for inner-city Catholic schools.

Father Starratt also provides school renewal programs to a national network of Jesuit high schools as well as a network of Asian Catholic schools. He has written a book in collaboration with Thomas Sergiovanni and a number of articles on moral education, leadership, citizenship education and teacher's values.

He concluded his address with this metaphor: "If a school is a symphony," he said, "your job is to help each kid play his part."

Faith-Sharing Retreat

"Prayer and God's Creation" is the topic of a faith-sharing retreat Friday and Saturday, Dec. 6-7, at High Acres in Geneva. Women interested in deepening their knowledge of the call to religious life are invited to this event, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy.

Sister Maureen Servas and Sister Anne Curtis will be presenters. They will focus on God's creation as seen through the eyes of a potter. For more information, call Sister Sheila Stevenson, (716)244-2175; Sister Marie Catherine Cain, (607)732-6295; Sister Pat Prinzing, (607)324-0833.

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed to deliver meals to homebound and disabled residents in the Rochester area. The service is sponsored by Meals-on-Wheels, a program of the Visiting Nurse Association of Rochester and Monroe County.

Volunteers will spend one to two hours each day, either one day a week or one day every other week.

For more information, call Christine Wallington at (716)428-0120.

Renewal for Overeaters

The Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal is offering a Morning and Evening of Renewal for Compulsive Overeaters Mon-

day, Nov. 25. Sister Mary Sullivan, a Cenacle Sister who has maintained a 90-pound weight loss, will lead the renewals.

Both programs will include presentations, reflection time, sharing and refreshments. The early program is scheduled from 9:30 a.m. to noon and the evening program from 7-9:30 p.m.

Call (716)271-8755 for more information or reservations.

CDA News

The Catholic Daughters of the Americas last month celebrated their annual Mass for deceased members and hosted a workshop for officers and members of local courts in the diocese.

The Mass was celebrated by Bishop Dennis W. Hickey at St. John's Church in Clyde and was followed by a luncheon at the V.F.W. hall hosted by members of Court Gleason, CDA, of Clyde. A check for 42,500 was presented for the education of future seminarians.

New York State Court Treasurer Sally Rytlewski of Albion, N.Y., conducted the workshop, entitled "Unity and Charity," reviewing the CDA's national constitution and directives.

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Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Saturday evening.

I wish you all could have been with me this morning at Mercy High School. Our diocesan Catechist Congress was held there from last evening through this afternoon. I had the pleasure of addressing more than 500 of our catechists from all parts of the diocese and of presenting Outstanding Catechist awards to persons from 76 of our parish communities.

It was a joy to be in that company and somehow to be touched by the enthusiasm of so many women and men who day in and day out offer such important ministry among us. They are humble, joyful, generous, able and thoroughly dedicated persons whose ministry, I believe, will become increasingly important in the years ahead.

Among them today was Lena Cowley. I mention her, in particular, because she was honored in a special way for her service to the people of St. Felix Parish in Clifton Springs. Lena (who assured me she wouldn't mind if I mentioned her age!) is 95 and has prepared 50 classes of young people for the reception of their first Holy Communion.

As a loving ovation from her peers filled the auditorium, she smiled with a peaceful radiance. One could only guess at all of the life that rested behind the smile. My own guess was that it reflected her discovery of Christ in the young and of the young in her prayerful union with Christ.

In any case, she did two wonderful things for me today. She exemplified the holiness of the assembly, and she witnessed to the peace and grace that shine from those who for long years live

in the Lord and offer themselves in service of their sisters and brothers.

There were many other stories today: the mother of five who is now a college student and who still finds time to teach our young people; another person who has moved several times and who has offered her services in each of her parishes; the person who has devoted years to preparing some of our very special young people to experience the love of Jesus in the sacraments.

An easy ministry? No! It is not carried out without a serious commitment to a life of prayer, and that demands ongoing dedication. It is not carried out without misunderstanding from some parents who are unable or unwilling to do their part, and that calls for a real sensitivity to others. It is not carried out without tough struggles to reach some of our young people, and that requires selfless patience.

A joyful ministry? Yes! At least if you listened to the people who gathered at Mercy today. They spoke of life and promise, the wonderful goodness the Lord shows us in our young people and how the Lord has taught them so much of Himself in their years of service.

I thank Sister Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, and our diocesan Religious Education staff for organizing the congress, and for all of their excellent work. We can be very proud of them.

If you have an opportunity, please say a word of appreciation to the catechists in your parish. I am sure it would mean a great deal to them. And who knows? They may invite you to share in their joyful work.

Peace to all.

Craft Show

A holiday craft show, sponsored by the Sacred Heart Society and Home-School Association, will be offered Saturday, Nov. 23, 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., in the Holy Ghost School Hall.

Tables at the show will be available for rental by all interested crafters. Proceeds will

benefit the Holy Ghost Playground Fund. Refreshments and baked goods will be available.

For additional information, please contact Jean Arcieri, (716)889-4223, or John Piarulli, 247-1314.



Share the joy of Christmas with some special people

The Holy Childhood Association is currently distributing a special Christmas Seal folder in your area.

Holy Childhood Christmas Seals have been a Christmas tradition which started with the introduction of the first religious Christmas Seal in the United States in 1915. HCA is happy to have this opportunity to share with you this limited edition of the various designs that have been presented over the last seventy years.

By using HCA Christmas Seals and Gift Tags, you will alert friends and neighbors to the needs of children around the globe and to how Catholic youth in the United States are sharing their love.

HOLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION

1720 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036

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The Holy Childhood Association is the official mission education agency for the young in the Catholic Church.



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