

# No miracles, but steady progress at Holy Cross resource room

By Teresa A. Parsons

Parents who want a Catholic education for their learning disabled children have a new option this year at Holy Cross School, 4488 Lake Avenue.

Thanks to grants from a Delaware foundation and the Diocese of Rochester, special education teacher Judy White arrived last October and by November had opened a learning disabled resource room on the school's second floor.

"Over the years there has been a plea from parents with learning disabled children for such a program in the Catholic schools to serve the needs of mildly learning disabled children without sending them to public schools," said Sister Carolyn Knipper, Holy Cross principal.

But cost always stood in the way. This year, Sister Virginia Steinwachs, assistant superintendent for urban education, obtained an \$8,000 grant from the Raskob Foundation of Wilmington, Delaware, which the diocese matched.

Although qualified Holy Cross students were always entitled to special help with learning disabilities, they were required to travel to nearby public schools. In the process, these children who could least afford it were missing regular class time during the day.

Students also miss some class time to visit the Holy Cross resource room, but need only walk down the hall rather than board a bus.

Eligibility for help from the Holy Cross program is also more flexible than public school requirements. Before being enrolled in the public school learning disabled program, children are screened with a test conducted by the District Committee on the Handicapped. Some Holy Cross students who use the resource room were referred by that committee. But thanks to the small size of the program, White can also work with children on the borderline — those who are mildly learning disabled and would not qualify for help in the public school. Some of these children simply need better study habits or are easily distracted in the classroom, she said.



Teacher Judy White helps uses a computer to help third graders Michael O'Buck (left to right), Jason Glasow, and Kristie Wagner with their English.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Communication between White and the students' regular teachers is also much improved by being in the same building. Regular weekly conferences allow White to gear resource room activities to what the child is studying in other classes. Her expertise is also useful to regular teachers in identifying possible learning disabilities.

"It helps to get the children early," she said. "But sometimes it's very difficult to distinguish between what may be immaturity and what is an actual learning disability in a kindergarten-aged child."

With a master's degree in special education from Nazareth College and experience in the

BOCES program as well as substituting in the Rochester City School District, White has experience with a wide range of ages and abilities.

At Holy Cross, she has appreciated being able to design and carry out her own program and to work very closely with one or two students at a time. Individual attention is crucial in working with learning disabled children because each student has different goals and needs, she explained.

Neither White nor any other teacher can correct most learning disabilities. In many cases, they can't even tell what truly causes a learning problem; some say they result from

faulty neural connections in the brain while others argue for environmental causes or some in-between combination. Instead, she helps students compensate using other skills.

Copying and writing, for instance, are activities that may help a student who can understand words verbally but can't recognize them in written form. Another student who can't remember the sounds connected with written words might compensate by memorizing grammatical rules that enable him to figure words out each time he sees them.

Since each student is different, the amount of time White works with a given child is determined individually. Most sessions range from 20 to 45 minutes once a day. To date, five students ranging from kindergarten to seventh grade, are using the Holy Cross resource room, which has a capacity of 20.

White found that initially the older children were troubled by the label "learning disabled."

"Any label is bad because it's a label," White pointed out. "I had to explain to them that there's nothing wrong with their minds."

"Learning disabilities don't affect your intelligence. In fact, you can be a genius and have a learning disability," she said, adding that nearly all of the kids have learned to enjoy their resource room sessions.

She has also received "very positive" responses from parents, although the progress she has observed is steady rather than startling. This year, for instance, one student was able to read his own tests whereas in the past, teachers have had to read the questions to him. The parent of another child has noticed that he is choosing to read on his own for the first time.

"That may or may not be because of the program," White said. "I haven't seen any big miracles yet, but I do believe in them. It just takes more time."

For more information about the resource room at Holy Cross, interested parents are invited to call Judy White or Sister Carolyn Knipper at (716)663-6533.

## Parenting Lectures

Dr. Dennis Boike, a Penfield therapist who specializes in marriage and family counseling, will discuss the importance of family meetings in a series of lectures entitled "Your Children from Birth to Twelve: Child Development and Child Discipline." The series will be offered at Nazareth College during February and March.

The six-lecture series is open to the public and will run on consecutive Wednesday evenings from Feb. 5 to March 12.

"More and more parents are searching for information, skills and support in handling the challenge of rearing children," Boike

notes. "Parents are asking not merely how to discipline, but how to develop a child's self-esteem and how to resolve family conflicts constructively."

## Irish Children Need Hosts

Project Children and the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Elmira are seeking families willing to host a child from Northern Ireland for a six-week visit this summer. Last summer, 12 Catholic and non-Catholic children visited the Chemung County area.

For more information, call (607)732-0148.

## February Renewal at Cenacle

Two renewal events and a retreat will be offered by the Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal early in February.

On Saturday, Feb. 8, a day of renewal for separated and divorced men and women is planned from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Beverages will be provided but participants should bring a bag lunch. Offering is \$5.

Men and women are invited to a "February Break" retreat the weekend of February 14-16. Celebrate Eucharist with Father Joseph A. Hart and take time to listen, reflect, pray and prepare for Lent. Offering is \$55.

Married couples can celebrate the eve of St. Valentine's Day at the Cenacle with an

evening of renewal, Thursday, Feb. 13, at 6 p.m. After a candlelight dinner, Sisters Anita Rourke, r.c., and Barbara Kingston, r.c., will share a presentation. Eucharist and a renewal of marriage vows will also be celebrated. Offering is \$25 per couple.

For more information or reservations, call the Cenacle, (716)271-8755.

## Brockport CDA To Meet

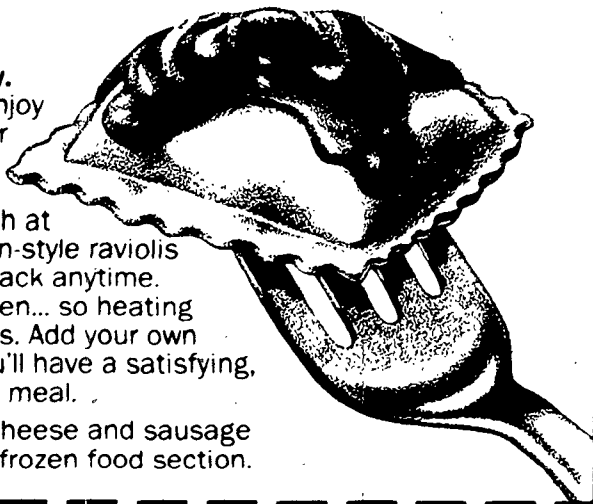
Catholic Daughters of the Americas will meet Feb. 13 at the Court Nativity #931 of the Blessed Virgin Mary at 6:30 p.m. for a spaghetti supper for the organization's regular meeting. The dinner is free.

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