

Catechists consider new techniques, personal prayer

By Jeanne Gehret

"A catechist is faith; hope; and love attached to arms and legs, aches and pains, family duties and not enough time," begins a poem by Monsignor John Francis Murphy.

Demonstrating their faith, hope and love once again, more than 500 catechists carved time out of their Saturdays this month to attend regional catechetical conferences in Auburn, Henrietta and Horseheads. "I saw so many fresh, enthusiastic faces," said Denise Mack, director of religious education at St. Rita's, who presented workshops on prayer in two regions. "They're so dedicated, and they do such a good job."

In every location the conference workshops centered around two dominant themes, prayer and teaching methods, said Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, director of religious education for the Diocese of Rochester. "Prayer is the heart of catechetical ministry because it keeps the catechist's own faith alive," she said. "Teaching methods make students want for themselves a faith that delights and sustains."

Teaching is an investment in the future, experts have said. Christa McAuliffe, the teacher who rode the Challenger, summed up her public school career this way: "I touch the future; I teach." Relating that statement to religious educators, Father John Hayes, who delivered the keynote address at the Henrietta conference, paraphrased McAuliffe: "I touch eternity, I teach children about God."

For the catechist, prayer is as essential as breathing, Mack said in her workshops. "There's no way we can teach if we're not plugged in."

"If we spend an hour a day talking to the students about God, then we should also devote at least that much time daily talking to God about those we teach. Some of that time may be when we're driving around or going off to sleep, but a good chunk of it should be quality time," she said.

"Hold each child in your mind's eye and ask God how you can help that child deal with his or her fears, hopes and dreams."

Mack also recommended finding a spiritual director or "soul friend" to accompany oneself on the spiritual journey—"someone who will be truly honest in helping you clarify your thoughts and feeling about how God is working in your life."

Practical teaching methods augment faith, said Patricia Lawlor, consultant for religious education in the Finger Lakes. "Catechists learn to trust their hearts. Prayer helps them realize that their teaching is inspired by God's speaking within."

"Their job is to reflect on the personal experience of God, then share it. Events like this congress equip them with specific techniques to do just that," she said.

Popular workshops on technique centered on storytelling, audio-visuals, arts and crafts. Christian discipline and children's liturgies. Kathleen Mahoney, who has found means to attract the attention of high school students and summer campers alike, demonstrated how to keep students on the edge of their seats with "enchanted theology: storytelling in the classroom."

Elizabeth Berliner, who teaches full-time at Holy Family Junior High in Elmira, led a session on Christian values and classroom management. "Classroom management is like prevention. You can avoid many problems by making it obvious that you're in charge and know what you're doing," she told catechists.

"Be there looking at each student when he or she walks in," she advised. "Have something on the board for them to copy (in the older grades) or something to color at their seat when they first arrive. This will give you a couple minutes to deal with children who come in late or need special attention before class."

Keeping the students' interest also prevents discipline problems, she said. "Some people learn by interacting, some by listening, some by seeing or reading—so you should vary your method of presentation to reach as many kids as you can."

Even the best classroom management fails at times, Berliner continued. That's when discipline comes in.

"Anybody can humiliate or frighten a child into good behavior, but that kind of discipline does not give witness to our Christian belief in the dignity of each person," she said. "Instead, we want a child to grow into self-discipline, to cooperate because it makes a harmonious community and because it's the right thing to do."

Many workshops were geared to specific age groups, including a session on teenage sexuality presented by Debra Girtman and Lisa Stine



Susan Kost

Led by director Cheryl McElhatten, the children's choir of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in Hamlin lent a tuneful note to one of workshops featured at the Genesee Valley regional catechist congress on November 8.

from the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry.

Girtman told catechists they can help prevent teen pregnancies by instilling self-esteem in adolescents and by teaching them to plan and make decisions. "Teens are very geared to the present," she said. "For them there's no life beyond high school. They need to understand that the decisions they make today can affect tomorrow, and their whole life. Teenagers who like themselves make better decisions about their futures."

She added that assertiveness training is also important so that teens can say no to premarital sex "and feel comfortable enough not to give a reason if they don't want to."

Girtman and Stine also described the family-life demonstration project, a federally funded program of the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry. The program hosts workshops for parents and preteens (or teenagers) to work on communications, self-image and decision making, as well as to see and discuss a film about a 15-year-old mother. For more infor-

mation, call (607) 734-9784 or address your inquiry to 160 High Street, Elmira, NY 14901.

Sponsoring the congress regionally was a change from last year, when a single conference was held in Rochester for the entire diocese.

"Holding conferences regionally makes it easier for people from the rural areas to attend, and also allows us to use more speakers from those regions," said Virginia Stanton, consultant for religious education in the Southern Tier. "For some catechists in this region, Rochester is a three-hour drive." This year, one observer noted, the conferences were close enough that people who had other commitments attended for just part of a day.

The Southern Tier conference, hosted at St. Mary Our Mother School in Horseheads, coincided with the Monroe/Livingston catechist congress at Guardian Angels School in Henrietta. The Finger Lakes region presented its catechist congress Saturday, November 15, at Sacred Heart Church in Auburn.

Retreat master/author to lecture in divinity school auditorium

Father Thomas H. Green SJ, will deliver the third lecture in the Spiritual Life Forum series on Monday, November 24, at Colgate

Rochester Divinity School auditorium, 1100 S. Goodman St., Rochester at 8:30 a.m. The presentation, "Mysticism and Ministry: Discerning Love," will examine the relationship between prayer, action and vocation.

Support group sets meetings for hearing-impaired persons

Self Help for the Hard of Hearing (SHHH) is a national, non-profit, educational consumer group devoted to the welfare and interests of hard-of-hearing people. SHHH offers support, education and advocacy to its hearing-impaired membership.

The Rochester chapter meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month from September until June, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the corner of Westminster Road and East Avenue. The group welcomes guests and new members.

Call (716)271-2788 for information.

Born and educated in Rochester, Father Green is a prolific author and well-known retreat master who teaches spiritual theology at San Jose Seminary in Manila, and philosophy and theology at Ateneo de Manila University. His most recent book, "Vacation with the Lord," was published last August by Ave Maria Press.

The Spiritual Life Forum is a public lecture series offered annually by Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary and St. Bernard's Institute, and is free of charge.

Women's guild to host meeting at Cardinal Mooney High School

The Cardinal Mooney Women's Guild will host its November meeting in the school cafeteria on Monday evening, November 24, beginning with open-bar cocktails at 6:30 p.m., and a stuffed pork chop dinner at 7:30 p.m. The price of the dinner, which will be catered by Joe Resch, is \$8-per person.

Following the dinner, a Christmas craft

project will be offered by Ann Dougherty from Fabulous Flowers. Materials to make the decoration will cost \$2. Anyone interested in doing the craft project is welcome at 9:15 p.m.

Reservations for both the dinner and craft project are needed. Call (716)865-9371 or 865-1000 for information.

Fast for world hunger targets hunger in Africa, Philippines

On the Thursday before Thanksgiving, one million Americans are expected to participate in Oxfam America's 13th annual Fast for a World Harvest.

Through the November 20 fast, people donate the money they would have spent on food to Oxfam America — an organization based in Boston — to fund self-help development and disaster relief work in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Over the last two years, the fast raised more than two million dollars. This year the focus is on hunger in southern Africa and the Philippines.

Schools, churches and community groups within the region have already pledged support for the venture. Gov. Mario M. Cuomo has officially proclaimed November 20 as Fast for a World Harvest Day.

Call Oxfam America's press office at


(617)482-2111 to find out how your community is participating in the nationwide fast.

Mercy High runners take title

Congratulations to Our Lady of Mercy High School's cross-country team which won its second Private-Parochial League championship on October 29. Mercy runners captured the top three places in the meet, which was run at Roberts Wesleyan College in Spencerport.

Jeannine Muoio placed first with a time of 20:40, and received a plaque to honor her as the league's outstanding runner. Therese Mack finished second and Nikki LaMagna was third.

Other top finishers for the Monarchs were Jackie Muoio (5th place), Ann Paonessa (8th place) and Karen Mueller (9th place).



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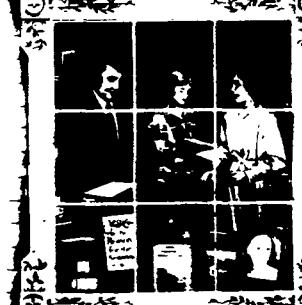


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