

Thanks Giving Appeal '86

Despite budget cuts, adult religious education still a bargain

By Teresa A. Parsons

If anyone should understand the value of lifelong education, it's a teacher. But somehow that message gets lost when it comes to religious education.

Each year, the diocesan Department of Religious Education sponsors a whole series of five-week courses on subjects from scripture to basic doctrine, Church history and morality. Geared primarily for volunteer catechists and Catholic school teachers, the courses, known as Continuing Education for Religion Teachers (CERT) and Adult Faith Enrichment, are open to any interested adult.

CERT and faith enrichment courses are widely recognized as a bargain. For as little as \$5 and no more than \$10, participants get 10 hours of class time with well-educated and experienced teachers. They get to share their own experiences with other faith-filled people. Even books and other materials are included.

So why were one quarter of all the diocese's CERT and adult faith enrichment courses scheduled for this fall canceled for lack of registration?

The most obvious reason is that people, whether catechists, schoolteachers or just inquiring minds, didn't show up.

In Isabelle Fay's experience, people who



have never attended an adult religious education course are reluctant to take on another commitment. But at least half of the 17 catechists at St. Patrick's Parish in Seneca Falls, where she is religious education coordinator, now take a CERT course each year.

"When they volunteer, I tell people it's expected of them," she said. "If they've gone once, they usually see the value in it. It's just getting them to go the first time that's the problem."

The word is also spreading among other parishioners, who are beginning to take CERT and adult faith enrichment courses as well.

"I've been trying to encourage people that they don't stop learning other things, so why shouldn't they keep on learning about their faith?" she said.

To become certified, all volunteer catechists in the diocese are asked to take 20 hours of instruction in basic methods and doctrine (Level I CERT), 10 hours each in Church, Scrip-

ture, Sacraments, and Morality (Level II), and 10 hours in advanced methods (Level III). Those are guidelines without a deadline, according to Maribeth Mancini, diocesan consultant for adult education. "The idea is just that there should be continuing formation," she said.

But it's largely up to religious education coordinators like Fay to inform and convince volunteer catechists and others not only to teach, but to keep on learning.

"One of the biggest problems we have is communicating to the ordinary person what programs are available for their enrichment," Mancini said. "We rely very heavily on religious education coordinators to get the word out."

Location is another factor that can inhibit attendance. Although limiting the number of sessions and centralizing their locations has helped avoid an increase in CERT fees for the past several years, many catechists and religious education coordinators still want CERT pro-

grams in their own parishes.

"We were supposed to have a course here last year, but it was canceled. It seems like everything in this area is offered in Owego," said Maria Mallins, a religious education administrator in her second year at St. John the Evangelist in Newark Valley. "Our teachers resent it. They feel they should have something here, that it's just another thing they have to go to."

"I have a bunch of new teachers, and I think it's very important for them to go," she added. "None of us are professional teachers, and we need all the help we can possibly get."

Not only distance, but also language was an impediment to catechists from St. Michael's in Rochester. So far this year, two of the parish's nine catechists traveled to Henrietta for CERT courses, according to Mary Beth Fuehrer, religious education coordinator.

"They enjoyed them very much," she said, "but I think we need some teacher training in Spanish. All my teachers this year were bilingual to some degree, but I know they would appreciate a course in Spanish."

More catechists and parishioners would also be likely to attend courses if offered in the city, since many don't own cars, she added.

Like many parishes, St. Michael's pays CERT fees for its catechists. Even though her budget can ill afford it, Fuehrer believes the cost is worthwhile. "They have to learn more than I can give them," she said.

On the diocesan level, CERT and Adult Faith Enrichment courses have their own budget crisis. Thanks Giving Appeal funds cover 87 percent of the cost of catechist formation and adult education. Last year's TGA shortfall meant that after three years of steady growth, the 1985/86 CERT budget was trimmed by nearly 30 percent (\$6,300). The following year, another 22 percent (\$3,300) was eliminated.

Included in the CERT budget are costs for the prescribed curriculum, catechist congresses and other workshops, and such resources as filmstrips and workbooks. Much of the resources allocated to the current semester were expended on three regional catechist congresses in November. Catechists did receive continuing education credit for the one-day sessions in Auburn, Horseheads and Rochester.

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(Reprint from the Courier-Journal - October 1971)

Women with Problems Turning to Birthright

Birthright is only three months old but has already handled 95 phone calls and is helping more than 50 distressed women to meet the physical, social or financial dilemmas that pregnancy has imposed on them.

Designed to offer alternatives to abortion, the non-sectarian, non-profit service began operation last July.

Mrs. Nina Trunfio, chairman, explained that Birthright brings together professional agencies, facilities and people needed to help a woman give birth to her child. Her problem may stem from the fact that she is single, or ill and fears the child will be born handicapped.

Birthright volunteers assess the needs of the individual, arrange for counseling, if desired, with social workers, clergy of various denominations, doctors and psychiatric services.

They will arrange appointments with pregnancy testing services, social services such as Barry Jesmer, John P. Des- Northhaven, the Monroe County Department of Social Services and Catholic Family Center.

Birthright is a non-sectarian organization of more than 1000 Rochester area residents, including doctors, lawyers, social workers, and clergy of all faiths, whose common concern is to promote respect for human life at all stages.

There are volunteers on duty at the Birthright offices from 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. At all times, a recorded one device takes all messages, informs the caller when the office will reopen and gives the caller a home phone number of a volunteer for emergency.

The Birthright phone number is 325-8700. Calls are coded for complete privacy and all communications are treated in strict confidence. In order to assure greater privacy for clients, the address of the office is not published. It is given to women who telephone and wish to come in for consultation.

Besides Mrs. Trunfio, other members of the Birthright executive committee are Mrs. J. Barry Jesmer, John P. Des- Northhaven, the Monroe County Department of Social Services and Catholic Family Center, Father Robert G. Miller



(Reprint from the Courier-Journal - February 1982)

Birthright Awarded United Way Grant

Birthright of Rochester, a confidential service offering alternatives to abortion, will receive a grant of \$23,000 from the United Way this year, its first-time-ever assistance from the fund.

A non-sectarian agency, Birthright offers referrals and contacts with clergy of many faiths, social workers at child and family centers, legal and financial professionals and volunteer physicians.

Set up for those with problem pregnancies, it also provides adoption assistance, financial help, psychological support, a place to stay and confidential, experienced services.

Birthright becomes the second independent birth-related agency to receive United Way support in two years. Last year, Natural

Family Planning received aid. In another development, the United Way board has approved the optional donation plan. Four options are: 1. the same as before with donations going into the general fund for distribution among the 160 United Way agencies according to need; 2. contributors may have gifts allocated through the same process but may designate agencies they do not wish to support and United Way will so guarantee; 3. contributors may designate contributions to particular United Way agencies; 4. contributors may contribute to any local health or social service agency recognized as a public charity by the Internal Revenue Service and registered with the State Office of Charities Registration.

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