



## Parish encourages non-commercial Christmas



Linda Dow Hayes, Courier-Journal

Helper Lori Uhrmacher works with Brian White in making Mary and Joseph figures. The alternative celebration offered St. Mary's parishioners and guests the opportunity to participate in an Advent prayer service, make a variety of craft items, and enjoy a puppet show and a pick-up rock band.



St. Mary's parishioners (left to right) Eileen O'Brien, Marcia Welz and Lillian Streppa cut felt leaves and berries for holiday napkin rings.



Meghan Conley, 7, of Rochester adds some artistic touches to a mural during St. Mary's Alternative Christmas Celebration, Tuesday, Dec. 6.



## Gift of faith

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tears of joy because they know they have been missing so much, and these people help them to find it."

Involvement with REC also helps prepare prisoners for return to the outside world. "I try not to become adapted to prison life," Ortiz remarked. "I try to stay as normal as I can, and with the help of these people and Christ, I know I can make it out there with my loved ones."

One REC veteran who agrees that the program prepares inmates for returning to the outside world is Joseph -- an assumed name. Paroled in 1984, Joseph now works as a substance abuse counselor in Rochester. When he first left prison, he lived for a year with a REC team member and his family. Other REC acquaintances helped him find a job.

"I can very openly and sincerely say, if it wasn't for the program, I probably would not have had a chance to be involved with what I'm involved with now," Joseph said. "The pro-

gram gave me a new vision of myself, prepared me to go into the outside world."

Since leaving prison, Joseph has staffed a number of RECs, and in January will be directing one at Orleans Correctional Facility. "It's because of (REC team members') coming to the institution that I'm here," he said. "I'm gifted with all they've given me."

Palleschi acknowledged that the REC volunteers who work on the retreats and the Tuesday evening meetings help the prisoners to grow. But he points out that he and his fellow REC volunteers also profit from their involvement.

"It's just a fantastic experience to see how (the inmates) change," Palleschi said. "It happens on the REC itself, then you see it deepen as the weeks, months and years go by. I tell people I don't give near as much as I receive."

Ortiz disputes that assertion, insisting that REC's volunteers make the program work. "Their gift to us," he concluded, "is that they help us open up and see that with Christ, no matter how bad it was, the road becomes paved."

## Journey

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ing," said Ostrowski, who was assisted by Linda Schumacher.

In addition to the living drama, Trinity Church hosted a modern-day bazaar which was set in a Middle Eastern environment. Food from the Mideast, such as baklava, kibbee, pita breads, assorted fruits and cheeses were available, as were contemporary Christmas crafts and American foods. Entertainment, which was provided by several Rochester-area churches, added to the festive nature of the celebration.

"We weren't sure how the idea (of a living dramatization) was going to be received, so we decided to have a traditional bazaar," Ostrowski said. "It was hard to know how people would view it. We kept thinking the whole time that, after all this work, nobody would come and see it."

Those fears were quickly dispelled as the production played to a packed house all three nights. Ostrowski estimated attendance to be around 1,500 for the three nights combined.

"We actually had a problem with traffic flow," said Ostrowski, which is something the parish hopes to alleviate if it decides to put on a similar production next Christmas. "Our hope was to put on a production that was adequate ... but the end result was more than I bargained for."

## Fr. Cuddy

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to my stomach. When (my pastor) raised the host, he did a little jig. My answer to her was, 'Well, I know him and he's no Fred Astaire.'"

Despite his knack for charming most people, Father Cuddy's outspokenness has earned him the enmity of some of his readers. "I'm sure some of the Catholics despise me," he said, adding with a wink, "not the wise ones, the smart ones." Not everybody is enamored with Father Cuddy's homespun writing. Referring to one reader critical of his column, he said, "I love the woman who was mad because I spoke so much about food, (but) our Lord was forever going to feasts."

Life for Father Cuddy seems to be a feast, and all who meet him are sure to get an invitation. Currently retired priest-in-residence at St. Alphonsus in Auburn, he stays active by writing, celebrating Mass and visiting the sick. As he enters his eighth decade, Father Cuddy has been described by his longtime friend, Deacon Kester, who quoted from Psalm 92 praising those who "are planted in the Lord." The psalm promises that "They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be."

## Foster parents

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thirds of the stipend money is used to pay their salaries. Consequently, Andrew's Center is forced to rely on donations to offset the difference between expenses and the stipend amounts.

This coming June, the center will face yet another dilemma. St. Andrew's Parish has allowed the sisters to use the former convent rent free, but the parish council recently voted to lease the building because the parish needs additional income. The sisters are faced with finding resources to pay the rent, or to find a new home.

Although the sisters are concerned about the

## St. Joseph's

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The sister's devotion to her work earned her the Sister Ann Loretta (Riesenberg) Memorial Award for having given more than 1,500 hours of volunteer work to the hospital in 1986. An interesting coincidence of the award was that both Sister Dolan and Sister Riesenberg entered the Sisters of St. Joseph's order in 1931.

And although Sister Dolan appreciated recognition for her work, she gets more satisfaction from the rewards she gets from working with patients in the Skilled Nursing Facility.

"I enjoy doing it so much. It makes me very happy," she said. "I just hope I can make them happy."

Especially, she said, during Christmas time. "Christmas with the patients is such a beautiful time," Sister Dolan said. "There are so many beautiful things going on, and I'm just glad I am able to share some holiday cheer with them."

problem, their primary focus at this time remains on the children, who, they say, have taught them how to face problems.

"You want to accomplish this, this, this," Sister Habecker remarked. But by watching the children -- especially those with disabilities -- "You learn patience," she said. "They wait, so you learn to just sit back and say, 'What's the rush for?'"

Sister Habecker noted that when the sisters feel pressured, the children provide "a way of meeting God at the most unusual times. There are days when you want to scream, and just a smile at the most unexpected time makes you want to stand back."

"You learn to be flexible," Sister Kolmer acknowledged. "You realize that it's not all in your hands. Everything is in the hands of God."