

Student volunteers to spread the Gospel

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

SCOTTSVILLE — Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to children. Julie Meloche, a senior at Wheatland-Chili Central School, would wholeheartedly agree on the matter.

"They're full of love," she said of the second-graders she teaches in religious education class every Sunday at St. Mary of the Assumption Parish. "They notice everything. They make me laugh."

Meloche devotes much of her spare time to making children smile, whether inside the classroom or outside in her neighborhood. She plans to attend the State University of New York at Potsdam next fall to study elementary education and mathematics. It's all part of her dream to work full-time with children.

Currently, Meloche's Sunday sessions will have to satisfy her desire to educate youngsters. Part of that process is learning to speak their language, Meloche noted. "I try to put (it) in their terms," she said of her lessons. For example, to explain Jesus' resurrection, she compared the event to a butterfly emerging from a cocoon.

Along with 40 other parishioners from St. Mary's, Meloche also spends one Sunday afternoon a month visiting delinquent boys housed at the State Agriculture and Industrial School in Industry. The ways the boys react to the group's visits might be likened to the way the apostles greeted Christ's resurrection — with joy and some doubt.

"They like to open up," Meloche said, "but only so much." Parishioners are assigned one or two boys each, with whom

they shoot pool, play ping-pong or sit and talk. "We always have a birthday," she commented, noting that each parishioner brings a six-pack of soda for the visit.

Like the children she teaches, Meloche finds the boys responsive to someone who listens to their concerns, and who talks with them, rather than at them. "I think they're OK kids, mostly," she said. "I think they just have problems. They're no different than we are."

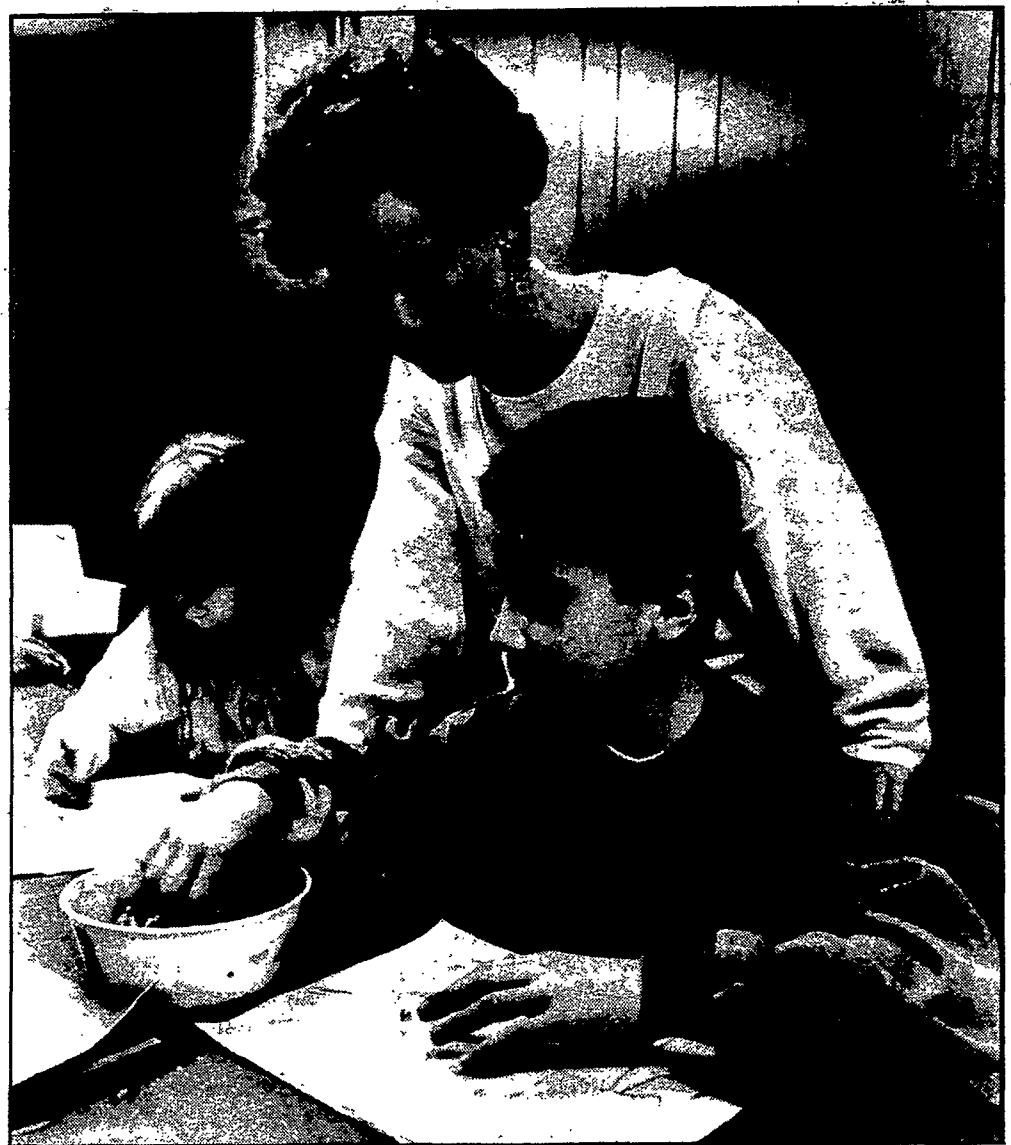
Despite their similarities, Meloche noted that many of the boys at Industry have come from families that don't care for them as has her own family.

"One time a boy asked me if he could write to me," she recalled. "He said, 'I just wanted you to write because my parents never do.' That really bothered me. I can't even imagine that with the way my family is."

Images of a better life undergird the student's teaching style in her religious education class, where she drives home one concept time and time again: "God is love."

"The world can have peace," Meloche tells her students. "It just depends on the people." The Diocese of Rochester has already recognized Meloche as one of those people. At the Bishop's Day with Youth, she received a "Hands of Christ" award for her volunteer service.

Meloche is currently teaching her students to use hand gestures to dramatize the hymn, "His Banner Over Me is Love." The students will perform the piece as their final project in June. When they do, they'll have learned about the work of Christian hands from an expert.



Julie Meloche helps Mike Kita and Melissa Laffredo complete their drawings during a Sunday morning religious education class for second-graders at St. Mary of the Assumption Parish, Scottsville.

Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Nazareth Academy

What would you do if a friend were abusing drugs or alcohol?

MELINDA DAVIS, freshman:

In Rochester, I think drug and alcohol abuse is very high. Some people use them for the good feeling, but others use them because they have no one to turn to. I think more speakers should go into the schools to tell us about the problem. It won't go away unless we make it go away.

PATRICE WHITE, junior:

I would go to an adult friend and ask questions, or go to the school nurse or counselor. Then I would confront my friend and tell her that I know she has a problem, and can I help her seek help. I would make an agreement with her that I'll be there for her.

AS TEENS SEE IT

KERRY BURKE, sophomore:

I would talk to them and try to see if I could understand why they were abusing drugs. Then, I would try and persuade them to seek counseling or drug rehabilitation. Since this would be a difficult time for them, I would stick by them through this entire ordeal.

TRACI DOBBERTIN, freshman:

I would definitely try to convince them not to and help them out in any way I could. I'd contact a counselor for him or her to get them help and also get them to quit.



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A: _____

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If yours is the winning entry, you will be mailed a coupon for a free album or tape of your choice redeemable at the House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave.

All entries must be received within seven days of this paper's issue date. Winning names and answers will be printed the week following each drawing.

The Catholic Courier

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