

Task group

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do some homework with their children in order to make the reception of a sacrament an enriching experience for the family as a whole, Stanton said. "Rather than looking to just include the particular child who's looking to prepare for a sacrament, there's an ongoing formation of the family so the first penance doesn't become the last penance," she said.

Stanton illustrated her office's philosophy by pointing to the way in which the sacrament of confirmation is now administered to candidates. "It's very common for the entire family to come up and be presented to the bishop," she said.

She explained that the family-centered approach to the sacraments began to develop in the mid-1970s, following papal encyclicals and statements encouraging the inclusion of family in a candidate's sacramental preparation. Although initially resisted by some parents, the "new" approach has won over most of today's families, Stanton said.

"Most of the time, the response I get is great," she said. "Most parents ... are grateful to have ways of interacting with their children."

Generational interaction is the basis of Patricia Lawlor's work in coordinating the Southern Tier's intergenerational catechesis program. Lawlor trains parish catechetical leaders to run classes for students ranging in age from 5 to 75.

The traditional model of grouping students in religious-education classes that parallel grade-level configurations no longer appeals to students, Lawlor said. "It's like pulling teeth to make them want to come," she said.

Yet, once younger and older students are allowed to work together, near-miracles result, she said, recalling one penance workshop she conducted for children and their parents. The class exercise consisted of a six-step repentance process the children were asked to make a "sinful" cartoon character go through.

Each character personified a certain vice, Lawlor said. Picky Patty, for example, personified rudeness, and a student — assisted by his or her parent — would show how Patty could make up for her latest infraction through the process of confession and restitution.

Following a class discussion of the cartoon characters, Lawlor recalled, "I had one parent come and say to me, 'While you were saying this to the children, I was thinking, 'Yeah, I do that sometimes, too.'"

Education and family life also converge in the division of youth ministry's sex-education program, according to Patrick Fox, director of the diocesan Department of Youth Ministry. Fox remarked that some of the initial course work for students in sexuality classes calls for parental involvement.

Fox added that his division serves families through its sponsorship of Family Camp at Kamp Koinoia, a 296-acre site in Yates County where, four times a summer, families can vacation in a faith-centered environment for one week. Camp activities include separate educational sessions for children and adults, and nightly family sharing hours.

As these examples show, family-life ministry in the Diocese of Rochester is so interwoven with other ministry efforts that at times it is indistinguishable from related programs.

Yet the Fischers would prefer to see family-life ministry in the diocese housed

in a centralized office that would serve as a resource center for the all diocesan and parish-based family-life programs. Such an arrangement, they pointed out, is used successfully in the diocese of Altoona/Johnstown, Pa., where the Family Life Office serves as a clearinghouse for all family ministries.

Nearly all of the programs operated or overseen by the Altoona/Johnstown office are currently available in the Rochester diocese, but they are scattered throughout its various agencies and divisions.

Monsignor William Peters, director of the Pennsylvania diocese's Family Life Office, noted that centralizing family services under a single office offers a distinct ad-

vantage.

"I think the biggest advantage I can see to it is that families can really identify with the (office)," he said. "It tells them that the diocese sees families as important."

Williams favored the concept of a centralized family ministry office, but stressed that it should emphasize parish-based family ministry. "I see it more as a coordinating center, providing guidance, education and training for parishes," she said.

On the other hand, Barbaro said such a center would only drain funds from ministries already in place. "If we were to have have an office and a family life director, it would take a lot of resources ..." he said.

Pope implores African couples to renounce infidelity, abortion

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

SARH, Chad — Speaking during a prayer service in southern Chad Jan. 31, Pope John Paul II urged couples to reject divorce, polygamy and abortion as offensive to the sacrament of marriage.

"Families are built on authentic love," the pope told some 20,000 people gathered at a sports field in Sahr, one of two cities he visited near the end of his eight-day West African trip.

"The worthy and serious commitment of marriage excludes the possibility of divorce and that of taking the life of a conceived baby," he said.

The pope emphasized that the church also insists on the couple's "capacity to love each other faithfully their whole lives." Polygamy and cohabitation in Chad, as in many African countries, are persistent pastoral obstacles for the church. The pope's strong defense of marriage


reflected recent statements by the nation's bishops, who are disappointed at the unenthusiastic attitude toward the sacrament among Chad's Catholics.

One reason, the bishops said in a pastoral statement, was that church marriage "has not yet found the festive expression needed to enter into social life."

Another concern is that in Chad, mixed marriages between Catholics and Muslims or other Christians predominate. Often, the result is a difficult marriage or a weakened faith, local missionaries say.

Although abortion has never been formally legalized in Chad, it is becoming a common practice in the rapidly growing cities like Sahr and Mondou, the other stop on the pope's swing through the south.

"We're very worried about it. It's increasing in areas that are poor, hungry and overcrowded," said one Capuchin missionary priest.



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