

Watkins duo deepens faith through teaching

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

WATKINS GLEN — Ask most school teachers when they learned the most about their subjects of expertise, and they're likely to tell you it was only after they began teaching.

Lucy Adesso and Barb Malina can claim that their years as religious educators have had a comparable impact on their knowledge of their faith, and on their spiritual lives.

"It just widened what I knew about (my faith)," Adesso said.

"I have grown more in my faith through my teaching than by any other method," Malina acknowledged.

The duo from St. Mary of the Lake Parish have not only learned from their experiences, they also have showed a commitment to religious education that earned them recognition from the Diocese of Rochester this past spring.

During the diocese's annual Catechist Awards Ceremony, Adesso received the St. John Fisher Award for 20 years of service. Malina, who has taught reli-

gious education for 13 years, was honored with the Elizabeth Ann Seton Award.

Adesso began her career as a substitute in the parish's religious-education program. After one year as a substitute, she was asked to take over the fourth-grade class. "I said, 'You've got to be out of your mind,'" she recalled.

Adesso said that when she began she lacked "formal" religious education. But she did have a family in which prayer, reading the Bible and saying the rosary were important.

Still, she had doubts about teaching religion.

"My fear was that I wasn't going to be able to give them

enough," Adesso recalled. But the sisters who were directing the program told her, "You can just get up there and show these children some love and respect," she recalled.

Nineteen years later, she is still teaching the fourth-graders. "I just found that God was working with me and He kept me well," Adesso said.

Malina had studied education in college, so she had some sense of what teaching was about. But she, too, was hesitant at first.

One day, however, Sister Mary Garozzo, MPP, the parish's religious-education coordinator met Malina on the street and asked her to teach the first-graders. "It's hard to say no to Sister Mary," Malina observed.

After she had been teaching for four years, Malina and her family temporarily moved to Albany. They returned to the diocese about six months later, and Sister Garozzo again asked Malina for help, this time with an eighth-grade class that was giving the current teacher problems. Malina agreed to help out.

The class was split between Malina and the person who had been teaching the class since the beginning of the year. A week later, the original teacher quit, and Malina found herself in charge of both groups.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Watkins Glen resident, Lucy Adesso, stands by a garden shrine devoted to the Blessed Virgin.

From the eighth grade, the students went on into the parish's confirmation-preparation program, and Malina volunteered to help see them through that process. Then she and a friend, Linda Pierce, realized that the parish needed a youth group, so they started one. Malina continued involvement with all three groups up through this past year.

Both Adesso and Malina say they've gained a great deal from their involvement in the religious-education program.

"(The children) really rejuvenate me," Adesso said.

Malina's experiences had an even deeper, more dramatic impact on her faith.

At one point approximately four years ago, Malina began to doubt where God fit into her life, she recalled. She shared her doubts with Sister Garozzo.

"Sister Mary kept saying, 'Don't give up, don't miss the sacraments, and don't quit teaching,'" Malina related. "I was able to re-establish my faith and keep teaching."

The crisis "helped me be a better teacher, a better Christian, and a better person, I think," the catechist said.

The students have also helped her, Malina said. "You just learn from the kids," she observed. "The biggest lesson is trusting in the Lord in my personal life."

Teaching was not always a pleasure for both Adesso and Malina. Both have suffered through difficult classes and students.

One year, Adesso recalled, a girl in her class was "very doubtful about everything." At Christmas, for example, the student even questioned the miracles surrounding Jesus' birth.

Adesso said she was never sure whether she got through to the student, who later left town. But years later, the student returned, sought Adesso out, and apologized. "So it did sink in," Adesso said.

Many students come to the classes ill-prepared, Adesso noted, which makes religious education all the more important. "They don't get it at home, so what little bit they get (in class) is important," she observed.

Malina, too, recalls a student who gave her a hard time. Years later, the boy found himself playing golf with her husband. Malina said the boy told her husband: "You know, I guess I gave her the hardest time. But she kept at it. I really learned a lot from her."

Last year, "he came back and helped me with the class," she said. "You wonder if you get across to the kids, and here was one who came back because he saw how important it was."

Adesso will be returning to the program this fall for her 21st year. Malina, on the other hand, may have to leave temporarily because of some family concerns.

She said she hopes to return some day, however. "I really love working with the kids through religious education," Malina declared.



During a recent family reunion at her home, Barb Malina takes time to relax while her daughter, Theresa, uses the pool.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer



The Rainbow Kids
Christian Daycare Center

Now Accepting Registration for
September Enrollment

- Close, loving supervision • Certified, caring personnel
- Nutritious meals and snacks

Ages 8 weeks to 6 years
N.Y.S. Licensed

HOURS: Monday - Friday 6:30 am - 6:00 pm

696 Ridge Rd. • Webster • 787-0900
located in Plank Rd. N. school district

**REMINDERS OF HOME
& HERITAGE FOR
BACK-TO-SCHOOL**

Posters • Sweaters
Plaques • T-Shirts
Note Pads
Wind cheaters (a.k.a.
Sweat Shirts)


Stop in today and browse
through our large selection
of Irish apparel and
novelties to decorate your
room or dorm.

vigren
o'shaughnessy

IRISH IMPORTS
248-8346
39 S. Main St.,
Pittsford
Hours: Tues.-Sat. 10a.m.-5p.m.

Learning Disabled?

Discover the Rochester area's only
day school for learning disabled students in
grades 6 through 12.



The Norman Howard School
461-1600

Now accepting applications for Fall 1990
in the following grades: 9, 10, 11, 12

220 Idlewood Road, Rochester, NY 14618
Chartered by the New York State Education Department
Accredited by the New York State Association of Independent Schools