

Community reaches out to help ailing child

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GREECE — On Sunday, March 9, Father Robert S. Bourcy, parochial vicar of St. John the Evangelist, 2400 W. Ridge Road, paused during both morning Masses and posed this thought to his congregation.

"If you ever wonder where God is, just look out that door," he said.

Outside the church door stood a long line of hundreds of people who had come to the parish center to be screened and tested for a possible bone-marrow donation to 7-year-old



Christie Simonetti was diagnosed with leukemia in March, 1991.

parishioner Christie Simonetti. Testing began at 10 a.m. and ended around 8 p.m., according to Christie's mother, Lorrie Simonetti.

Christie needs a bone-marrow transplant to survive the leukemia that she was diagnosed with in March, 1991, according to her parents, Dave and Lorrie. The girl is scheduled for a marrow transplant on April 6, at a hospital in Seattle, Wash., but as of yet, no compatible donor has been found for the operation, her parents noted. Christie has a 1-in-20,000 chance of finding a donor, according to her parents.

About 2,250 people showed up for the screening, responding to public pleas made through the media by the girl's parents. Lorrie Simonetti said she was "overwhelmed" by the response from "complete strangers."

"Never did we expect to go to 8 o'clock at night, and we still had to turn people away," she said. "All these people wanted to tell me how much they wanted it to be them. It was pretty amazing."

She noted that results of the testing should be available by next week. Volunteers tested had a vial of blood drawn from their arm. The blood was then processed and added to a national marrow registry.

Lorrie Simonetti emphasized that volunteers can donate blood to be tested any time at any local Red Cross.

"They're screening the national registry daily for Christie," she said.

The community's massive response



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Hundreds of people waited outside St. John the Evangelist's Parish Center in Greece on March 8 for a blood test that will show whether they could donate bone marrow to leukemia patient Christie Simonetti.

to the request by Christie's parents for a compatible bone marrow donor compelled St. John's to schedule a second testing session on Wednesday, March 11, from 4-10 p.m., noted Father Bourcy. He added that at least 1,000 people were expected to show up for the testing, which costs \$45 per person. Potential donors who are unable to pay the fee can have it waived, accord-



Christopher Lembo (center) keeps a close watch as Terri Veno (right) finishes drawing blood from the arm of his father, Chuck Lembo, on March 8. Lembo was among 2,250 people who turned out for the donor screening.

ing to the Simonettis.

The Simonettis approached Father Bourcy with the idea to run the public screening in late February. The priest promoted the idea during his homilies at Masses over the weekend of Feb. 29-March 1, he said.

The parish also held an informational meeting about Christie's plight last Thursday night, March 5, Lorrie Simonetti said.

To fund the search for a donor, the Greece community has organized a number of events on Christie's behalf, including a bowling party and raffle.

Doug and Gary, a performing duo, will perform a benefit concert at Aquinas Institute, 1127 Dewey Ave., Rochester, on March 17, at 7 p.m.

Tic Tac Toys, 1100 Long Pond Road, will donate 10 percent of its sales from March 9-15 to the donor fund.

Further donations can be sent to the Christie Simonetti Fund, P.O. Box 26254, Rochester, N.Y. 14626.

For information on other ways to help Christie, call Camp Good Days and Special Times, 716/427-2650.

School seeks to initiate tuition-sponsorship program

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — St. Monica's School, 841 Genesee St., is attempting to begin a program in which donors pay students' full or partial tuition costs.

Sister Mary Marvin, RSM, principal, noted that nearly 60 percent of her students receive partial or full tuition subsidies from the diocese. She added that most of the school's 225 students come from low-income, single-parent families who find it difficult to pay the \$1,000 tuition fee each year.

One such parent is Janice Lightle, whose daughter attends fourth grade at St. Monica's. A single mother, Lightle works the school's weekly bingo games to gain a \$45 monthly credit toward her daughter's annual tuition fee.

Lightle noted that she would welcome a tuition subsidy since she's her daughter's sole provider, but she emphasized that she planned to keep her child at St. Monica's regardless of the cost.

"The number one reason she's there is because I like the way they teach the kids academically," Lightle said. "You get your money's worth."

The value of a Catholic education also concerns Connie Sanderson, assistant director of Sojourner House, a shelter for homeless mothers and their children. The home operates across the street from St. Monica's School.

Sanderson explained that since the fall of 1990, St. Monica's has accepted a small number of children from Sojourner House as students, regardless of their parents' ability to pay tuition costs. Many of the students' mothers have mental and/or health problems so the school serves as one of the few

stable environments that the children experience in their lives, she said, adding that St. Monica's could use the additional income a tuition scholarship program would bring.

Although the Genesee Street school receives various contributions, only two donors — a Rochester-area physician and a former St. Monica's teacher — regularly give donations earmarked as tuition subsidies to the school, Sister Marvin said. The principal added that she has been soliciting advice from the diocese on how to set up a systematic program to recruit and retain tuition donors.

The diocese has no centralized tuition-donor program, according to Father George Norton, diocesan public information officer. He noted, however, that a handful of schools have initiated tuition-donor programs on their own.

St. Boniface School, 15 Whalin St., has operated an "Adopt-A-Student" program since 1982, according to Ed Sloan, chairman of the School Committee. Sloan estimated that about 70 donors annually give between \$15-20,000 to the program, which benefits almost as many families as there are donors, he added.

J. Albert Guerin, a St. Boniface parishioner and a Catholic school graduate, has donated \$500 a year to the school fund.

"It's just my religion, that's all," Guerin said, explaining his reasons for giving. "As long as I don't have to pay anything else," he added jokingly.

The "Adopt-A-Student" program is modeled on a national program started 15 years ago by another Catholic school graduate, Thomas Bradley. He detailed the program's history in a phone interview with the *Catholic*

Courier from his office in Phoenix, Ariz.

A parishioner of St. Gregory's Catholic Church in Phoenix's inner-city, Bradley recalled that his pastor asked if he and his wife, Rosemary, would subsidize a student's tuition at the parish school. The pastor told Bradley that the blue-collar parish was finding it increasingly difficult to subsidize its school's students and that St. Gregory's needed to find alternate sources for tuition funding.

Bradley and his wife then wrote 100 letters to various friends and parishioners, asking them to make the same decision to subsidize a student. Eventually, the couple drew up a complete program detailing how Catholic schools might set up their own "Adopt-A-Student" program. Bradley Printers, Inc., Thomas' com-

pany, has since supplied the copyrighted concept for a small fee to more than 100 parishes throughout the country.

Bradley also estimated that parishes nationwide have raised at least \$1 million through the "Adopt-A-Student" program.

Sister Mary Lou Brien, SSND, was so pleased with the "Adopt-A-Student" concept that she took it with her when she left the principal's position at St. Boniface five years ago. Currently principal at Holy Ghost School, 220 Coldwater Road, Sister Brien established the program at Holy Ghost when she was hired as principal.

According to Sister Brien, between 75-100 donors have offered tuition sponsorship to about an equal number of Holy Ghost students.

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