

Catechesis in '90s marked by innovation

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

In the mid-1980s, Lola DeJohn struggled to make religious education at Clyde's St. John the Evangelist Parish interesting for her junior-high students and their parents alike.

"Young people were coming because their parents were making them come," recalled DeJohn, the parish's religious education coordinator. "Volunteer teachers were hard to get. Teachers were just dropping out because of discipline problems in the classrooms."

Not only did DeJohn shift her program's gears in 1987, she basically replaced the transmission completely by revamping the parish's approach to junior-high religious education.

Out went the traditional religious-education class characterized by a room full of students learning the weekly catechetical lesson from a teacher who stressed the basics of Catholicism year after year.

In came a new approach that featured small groups of eight students and their parents meeting monthly with a "facilitator" in such locations as the parish or a student's home.

Students and their parents meet each fall and select from a variety of religious-education topics. Then, usually together with their friends, the students separate into the small groups and prepare a monthly schedule of meeting times convenient for all the participants.

Since she instituted this approach, DeJohn has found that students once apathetic toward catechetics now approach her and suggest subjects for groups to study.

And volunteer facilitators — or "co-journeymen" — are easier to find, DeJohn said, since they are no longer defined as all-knowing teachers by students or parents.

In addition to eliminating volunteers' fears to help with students' religious education, the program also invites students'



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Michael Pietraszewski (right) reacts to missing a sign language cue Aug. 5, as he and Alex Baker rehearse the graduation ceremony for first-grade religious education at Holy Ghost Parish, Gates.

parents to participate in the small-group discussions. This eliminates the undisciplined environment that characterized the old classroom method, according to DeJohn.

Non-traditional approaches toward Catholic religious education have become more popular throughout the Rochester diocese as shown by the growing number of parishes offering summer vacation schools in religious education.

Holy Ghost Parish in Gates, for

example, offers a two-week, 33-hour, religious-education program each summer to its elementary-age parishioners.

Katie Fechtor, the parish's youth minister and director of religious education, noted that her parish began the summer-school program three years ago because students attending the weekly catechetical sessions during school evenings were generally tired out from their day and extra-curricular activities.

"The kids like the idea of not

having to crunch this in during the regular academic year," she said of the summer sessions.

The sessions also allow high school students to act as teachers' aides and parents to volunteer for a variety of tasks other than teaching since Fechtor can employ professional Catholic school educators.

For several years now, innovative and alternative approaches to religious education such as those used at St. John's and Holy Ghost have concerned Patricia Lawlor, diocesan consultant for religious education in the Southern Tier and the Finger Lakes.

In particular, Lawlor has specialized in presenting workshops on "inter-generational" religious education to parishes. She noted that at least 20 parishes in the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier now feature some form of inter-generational catechetics.

Such programs range from young people's sacramental-preparation programs that mandate parental involvement to liturgies directed at children, and community-service projects that expose them to such social problems as hunger and homelessness.

Inter-generational, religious-education programs differ from parish to parish, Lawlor said, but she stressed that ideally all parish catechetics should contain the following elements:

- **Formation** — the process by which a person is formed into a Christian through such elements as participating in liturgies and rituals, living out the faith in a community, and emulating role models — such as parents and grandparents — who practice what they preach.

- **Education** — the process by which young people should be taught to question how they are to live as Christians in the world. In particular, educating young Christians means allowing them to "own" their faith by encouraging them to wrestle with its implications, Lawlor commented.

- **Instruction** — Acquiring knowledge of such things as Scripture and church teachings, as well as techniques that can help a person conscientiously follow God's will.

Like catechesis in Lawlor's regions, religious education at Rochester's St. John the Evangelist Church, 545 Humboldt St., has also gradually become a family affair over the last 15 years, according to Pat Fox, director of religious education.

Once a month, five "clusters" of families, totaling 50 people, meet in the parish's learning center to take part in round-table discussions on various topics tied to whatever events are taking place in the church's liturgical year, he said.

In a room filled with six tables, the families move from one table to another every 15 minutes during which they focus on various levels of the topic at hand.


At the pre-schoolers' table, for example, the families might spend time listening to an audiotape on the subject at hand, and the children might spend time drawing pictures of what the group is talking about. Then, the families' cluster would move to another table, where adults would lead the discussion. Hence, the entire family gets an inter-generational perspective on a Christian topic, Fox concluded.

**Visit Catholic Schools
and
Experience Traditional
Excellence.**

**EVERYTHING
EDUCATION
WAS MEANT TO BE**

...and then some!

OPEN REGISTRATION



Nazareth Hall

PRE-K THROUGH 5 GRADES 6-8
458-3786 458-8583

NAZARETH SCHOOLS
THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH SINCE 1884.
A Tradition You Can Trust.

PRIVATELY OWNED AND OPERATED BY



**Performance Plus
Dance Productions**

*"Where quality
shines through"*

Our teachers
train with the best
to give you the best.


Ages 3 - Adult • Classical
Ballet • Jazz • Tap •
Acrobatics • Lyrical •
Comedy • Pointe • Adult
Classes • Ballroom for
Couples

FAMILY DISCOUNTS
Class size limited
Call Today For Choice
Times

621-3680
or
227-3487


Patty Drake Bellucco -
Director
425 Stone Rd. (Greece)
109 Lake Ave. (Hilton)

**BACK-TO-SCHOOL
FOOTWEAR VALUES**



**SAVE
\$400-\$600**
On Buster Brown,
Weebal & Willits.

These Little Piggies
went to Sullivan's
for great value, selection
and experienced fitters
in children's footwear.
\$5.00 off
your next footwear
purchase over \$20
With this ad thru Sept. 30, 1992



Our fitters are experts in fitting baby's
and children's shoes ... WE CARE.

SULLIVANS' Shoe Co.
PH. 442-8730 - 14 EDMONDS ST.
(Runs south opposite 516 Monroe Ave.)
CALL FOR OUR STORE HOURS