

Doll's creators say it helps kids 'know God'

By Steven Sims
Catholic News Service

BOCA RATON, Fla. — Allyson Thompson, 4, and her 7-year-old brother Cody talk to "Jesus" every day.

The Jesus they talk to is a doll, complete with dark hair, a beard, red robes, sandals and a big red heart. It's also cotton-filled, machine washable and two feet tall.

The doll is "a vehicle to help the child understand Jesus," said one of its designers, Justin Steurer.

He teamed to create the doll with Nancy Pulte Rickard, a 35-year-old land developer who came up with the concept. Realizing children tell their dolls everything, she said, she thought it would be great if they could "tell their Jesus doll everything."

"Think of the miracles of the heart

that could happen if they could be introduced to Jesus as their best friend," Pulte Rickard told *The Florida Catholic*, newspaper of the Diocese of Orlando.

She shared her idea with Steurer, a friend and fellow member of a Monday morning rosary group.

Steurer, a 62-year-old father of seven, said the doll's smile helps children "understand the friendliness of God." He described the cotton Jesus as "open, smiling, welcoming."

The doll is what the children need, Steurer said. "In the Gospels, they couldn't keep children away from Jesus; he had an appeal children felt safe with."

The two designers and their spouses cut 1,400 doll prints from rolls of fabric before sending them out to be sewn.

So far, more than 130 Jesus dolls have been sold, mainly through mail

order and word-of-mouth.

A white lamb doll is also available for \$5 each. Future biblical dolls such as Mary are in the design stages. They also plan an Abba, God the Father doll in their Firstfruits biblical doll series meant to inaugurate a line of faith-oriented dolls, books, audio tapes and other toys.

"One woman ordered eight dolls for friends in nursing homes, then she came back for four or five more," Pulte Rickard said.

"What better way for Jesus to come to people — children, shut-ins, people in recovery," said Steurer, noting that he and his partner wanted the Jesus doll to be more a "messenger than a plaything."

EDITORS' NOTE: For information on the Jesus doll (\$29.95) or other Firstfruits biblical dolls, call 1-800-227-8702.

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