

Parishes are the future of marriage preparation

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Last July, the Rochester diocese announced that it was phasing out most of its role in marriage preparation, and that parishes should start to develop and coordinate their own marriage-preparation programs.

Currently, several diocesan parishes are sending married couples to diocesan training sessions to learn the basics of hosting a Catholic marriage-preparation program. The next training session — the sixth in a series of eight since July — is slated for Saturday, Feb. 13, at St. Patrick's Church, 115 Maple Ave., Victor.

On average, nearly 25 couples have attended each session, according to Barb Carroll, diocesan coordinator of sacramental life. She added that most of the couples come from parishes that never hosted a Pre-Cana.

On Saturday, March 6, three couples and the pastor of Trumansburg's St. James the Apostle Parish, 17 Whig St., will host the Tier parish's first-ever marriage-preparation program from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Since his parish had never offered its own Pre-Cana program, Father Robert Kanka had to set about recruiting couples interested in explaining Catholic marital ideals to engaged couples.

Father Kanka noted that he and his parishioners were not fazed by the prospect of developing a marriage-preparation program.

"We thought it would be rather interesting to try it," Father Kanka said. "We thought we'd take a shot at it and see what we could do."

To pick up any slack created by the lack of parish-based Pre-Cana programs, the diocese will continue to sponsor some of its own marriage-preparation sessions, Carroll explained.

Diocesan sessions will be offered on a monthly basis up until June of this year. Then, from July, 1993-June, 1994, eight sessions will be scheduled. Finally, from July, 1994-June, 1995, four sessions are slated, she said.

Carroll said she hopes engaged couples will attend a diocesan session as a last resort — rather than a first choice.

"If couples come to diocesan marriage preparation, they're still not connected to their parish," Carroll observed. "Marriage is isolated from parish life. We're hoping that parishes develop their own approaches."

Marcy and Lou Gabello of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, 4536 St. Paul Blvd., Rochester, were more than ready for the switch from diocesan-led



A kiss between parents Marcy and Lou Gabello, lead couple for St. Thomas the Apostle Parish's marriage-preparation program, draws a raucous response from sons Garod (from left), Matthew and Luke.

to parish-based programs.

"St. Thomas has a very good reputation among Pre-Cana programs," said Marcy Gabello. She and her husband serve as the lead couple for the parish's marriage-preparation program. "We've been at it for 20 years. We were fully staffed and fully prepared."

In fact, the Gabellos have let others know that they are willing to offer advice and direction in helping parishes develop their own Pre-Cana programs.

Some parishes, such as St. Lawrence in Greece, have responded to the changes in marriage preparation by expanding the number of married couples they recruit to act as guide couples during sessions. Rick Ugino and his wife, Joan, lead the St. Lawrence marriage-preparation team. Rick said the parish has recruited seven new couples since the diocese announced it was phasing out its role in Pre-Cana.

On the other hand, Amy Israel, who runs the marriage-preparation program at St. Patrick's in Macedon, along with her husband, Ross, expressed some concern that their program may not attract as many couples compared to when the diocese made referrals to her Pre-Cana.

"You're just kind of waiting for the phone to ring," Israel said.

She also hoped that the diocese would still offer some kind of central office for obtaining marriage-preparation materials.

Although the diocese will no longer purchase Pre-Cana materials for use in sessions, parishes can contact the Pas-

toral Center for information on marriage-preparation books. Parishes can also learn about various available programs by contacting the sacramental life office and obtaining a parish resource booklet, Carroll said.

As its neighboring parishes develop their own marriage-preparation sessions, the team at Transfiguration Parish in Pittsford is examining what it will do when fewer and fewer engaged couples come to its Pre-Cana session.

Deborah Bussewitz, a member of the Transfiguration team, noted her parish

is considering developing marriage-enrichment programs. In the past, she said, the parish opened up its marriage preparation to people outside its boundaries. But if the number of engaged couples — of which there are few at Transfiguration — drop off even further, the parish may establish new programs to help married couples strengthen their vows.

"We need to change to the scope of what we're about," Bussewitz concluded.

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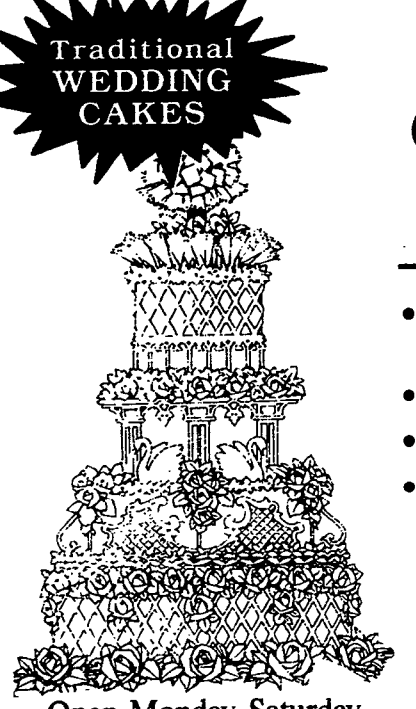
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