

Parenting

Camp offers caring for single-parent families

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

LIVONIA — It's exactly what every camping excursion should be: a chance to get away.

For parents and their children who attend the Single Parent Christian Camp, this is indeed a time for relaxation — and also for personal healing.

Since the late 1970s, the weeklong program has been conducted at Camp Stella Maris just prior to Labor Day. According to outgoing director Angela Gallo, the camp has attracted as many as 170 people at one time — some from as far away as New York City and Pennsylvania.

Gallo, also the ex-diocesan director of the former Separated, Divorced, Bereaved and Remarried program, said the camp's most basic asset is the opportunity for families to have badly needed quality time together.

"When you're a single parent, you spend so much time just on survival," she explained. "There isn't time to just be a mom or dad with the kids.

"You'd be surprised at how many children or parents have never gotten to sit by a camp fire," Gallo added.

Located on Conesus Lake, Camp Stella Maris offers a multitude of recreational opportunities for campers. Many activities are done in large-group settings, and others are tailored strictly for children or adults.

Nicholas Zufelt, 8, recalls that the most humorous moment he observed at camp occurred "when they rang the bell for dinner and the first one down was a dog."

Nicholas' sister Jillian, 5, remarked that her favorite part of camp is "when I play with everyone." Meanwhile, their brother Oliver, 10, particularly enjoyed camp last summer because it was the first year he was allowed to stay up as late as 10:30 p.m.

The Zufelts' mother, Nancy, initially came to Stella Maris with her children five years ago in the aftermath of a separation with her husband.

"I was really hurting and struggling. I had a very diffi-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

(From left, back row:) Pat Scott, Dave Lambert, Mackayla Heagarty, Angela Gallo, Nancy Zufelt, (middle row) Norma Scott, Oliver Zufelt, Nicholas Zufelt and (front) Jillian Zufelt all regularly attend the Single Parent Christian Camp at Camp Stella Maris.

cult time letting go," said Zufelt. "Angie (Gallo) said, 'It's difficult to acknowledge that you're a single parent.' All of my reality was shattered."

While her kids enjoyed the camp's fun and games, Zufelt also saw it as a time she could begin her emotional healing process.

"The most powerful experience I had was during a reconciliation service," said Zufelt, a parishioner at Ontario's St. Mary of the Lake Church. "That was what allowed me to regain my spiritual life; it was the turning point for me."

Zufelt and her children have been back to Single Parent Christian Camp every year since, and she is now in her first year as director of the camp's operating committee. (Gallo plans to stay on in an advisory capacity with the program, which offsets its expenses

through a series of fundraising activities.)

Pat Scott, whose 17-year marriage ended 11 years ago, has also gained tremendous spiritual nourishment since she and her daughter Norma, now 13, began attending camp not long after the separation occurred.

"You learn you have friends. You know they were all in the same big-ship you were in — and when they're hugging and consoling you, it helps immensely," commented Scott, a parishioner at St. Jude's Church in Gates.

Meanwhile, Norma Scott said the youth contingent prefers to focus more on events such as swimming, fishing and nature walks rather than dwell on family struggles.

"Mostly we try to keep our minds off it," she said. "We talk about it, but not too much."

Dave Lambert and Linda

Heagarty might be the best example of the close social atmosphere pervading Single Parent Christian Camp. Lambert, who is separated and the father of one, said his relationship with Heagarty and her three children "blossomed" during one camp. Lambert and Heagarty, who is widowed, are now engaged to be married.

Zufelt noted that "this beautiful ministry" could not have been possible without Gallo's

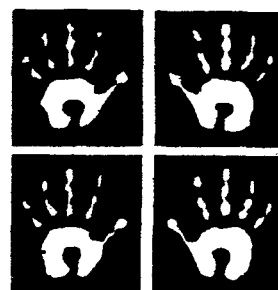
caring and support.

"It was because of all the years that Angie gave to the camp," she said.

"Without Angie, we'd all still be drowning," Scott agreed.

EDITORS' NOTE: The next Single Parent Christian Camp will be held Aug. 27-Sept. 2, 1995. Fees are assessed on a sliding-scale basis. Those interested in registering should call Nancy Zufelt at 315/524-1939 or Linda Heagarty at 716/293-1824.

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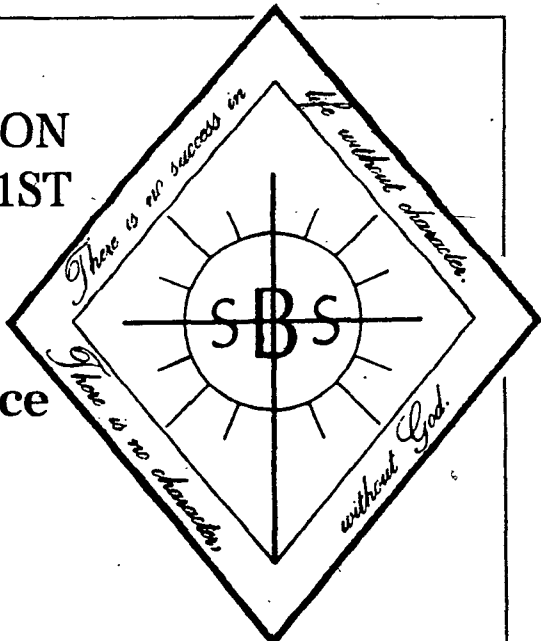


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