

Parenting

Grandparents tackle challenge of caring for children's children

By Pat Norby
Catholic News Service

MINNEAPOLIS — Grandmothers Hattie Johnson and Barbara Johnson share not only the same last name but also many of the same challenges.

They have jobs to go to. And children to raise. And tuition to pay at St. Bridget School in Minneapolis.

They also are in the same grandparents' support group at Senior Resources Northside Center, where they and 82 others talk about the difficulties of raising their grandchildren.

"All of my grandkids go to St. Bridget," said Hattie, who is raising her 10-year-old granddaughter, Alicia Jasper. "She's let everything God's given her get out in St. Bridget."

Hattie, 47, said she sent Alicia to the Minneapolis Catholic school at the encouragement of Barbara, 54, who is grandmother to three of Hattie's other grandchildren: Shunieberie, 10; Barbara, 7; and Andrea, 6. The three are the offspring of Barbara's daughter and one of Hattie's sons, who is now dead. Alicia is the daughter of another of Hattie's sons.

Across the country grandparents are playing larger roles in their grandchildren's lives when the youngsters' parents are absent, sometimes because of drug addiction, mental ill-

ness, death or other reasons.

A recent report by the American Association of Retired Persons said the number of children in households where grandparents are the sole caregivers for their grandchildren increased 17 percent between 1992 and 1993.

More than 633,000 households are headed by grandparents with neither parent of the grandchild present, the report said. The median annual income of grandparent caregiver households is \$18,000.

Johnson, who works two jobs to make ends meet, said she took over the care of her grandchildren because her daughter was using drugs. "She really didn't want them and she wasn't taking care of them," Barbara told the *Catholic Bulletin*, newspaper of the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese.

Although the state provides health and dental care for the children, it has not helped with any of their other needs, Barbara said. "For two years, I've asked for foster parent care funds, but they haven't listened," she said.

But St. Bridget's has helped by reducing tuition and providing used uniforms, she said.

Despite her age and the burden, Barbara said she doesn't regret taking in her grandchildren. "If they were somewhere else, I'd feel worse," she said.

Hattie also accepts the responsibility for Alicia without concern or resentment. "All my life I've had to do things I didn't think I could do at the time," she said. "It's not a job for me. It's not a chore. It's a pleasure. Knowing my grandchildren are all right is a joy."

Hattie took in Alicia about five years ago, when she learned that Alicia's mother was not getting the girl to school. "Her mom wasn't making it important," Hattie said.

Now, she is seeking legal guardianship of Alicia to ensure that the child will finish school and go on to college.

She says she's learned a lot since she raised her own three sons. "When I was raising my boys, I was a kid myself," Hattie said. "I didn't have a spiritual base."

Now Hattie is a minister with the Disciples of Christ. "I feel that God's given me a great life," she said. "My desire is to live on this earth and have peace of mind."

Hattie admits that she would have preferred for her grandchildren to remain with their parents. "It would have been nice to have freedom, to have the kids visit and go back home," she said.

But as she told her grandchildren who live with Barbara, "If I don't take care of Alicia, who would take care of her?"

Bishop presents station with Christophers' award

ELMIRA — Bishop Matthew H. Clark Jan. 24 presented WETM-TV in Elmira with the Christophers' Golden Jubilee plaque, honoring the station for outstanding public service. The presentation took place at Broadcast Center, 101 E. Water St.

The Christophers, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1945 to celebrate the spirit of the individual, is well known for their 30-minute weekly TV series, "Christopher Close-up," and for radio spots featuring the organization's long-time director, Father John Catoir.

The annual Christopher Awards program honors those media outlets that bring to the public books, movies and TV specials that affirm the highest values of the human spirit.

"I am pleased to present the Christopher award on behalf of Father Catoir," Bishop Clark said. "The media can have a profound impact on all of us. WETM should be commended for bringing inspirational, value-centered programming to the entire community."

Families have a choice in what they view," the bishop continued. "WETM has made a commitment to include programs that affirm each person and reinforce positive values."

While in Elmira, Bishop Clark will be interviewed for the Tier station's "Community Focus" program. The interview is scheduled to air in the next several weeks.

Josie Waverly to perform at Mercy High

BRIGHTON — Country music star Josie Waverly, a native of the Rochester area, will return home for two performances at Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road. The concerts are scheduled for Friday and Saturday, Feb. 17-18, in the school auditorium at 7:30 p.m. each night.

Waverly, a Hilton native, began her professional career in 1988 and was the opening act for such country stars as Randy Travis, Lee Greenwood, Charlie Daniels, Lorrie Morgan, Eddie Rabbitt, Ricky Scaggs and Jeannie C. Riley. She gained critical acclaim with her first album, "Who Cries This Time," released in 1993.

All concert proceeds will benefit Mercy High School. Tickets are \$10 per person and may be purchased at the door or by calling the Mercy box office at 716/288-2610.

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