

Family catechist highlights parental holiness

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

HENRIETTA — Few vocations are so holy and honorable as parenthood and so poorly recognized by the church, according to Dr. Kathleen O'Connell Chesto, a nationally renowned family catechist.

The church's canon of saints contains mostly celibate priests and religious with few saintly role models for parents, she stressed. Yet, Jesus' first public miracle took place at a family feast — the wedding at Cana — where He turned water into wine, she noted.

"That's what Jesus did because He didn't want a family celebration to somehow be interrupted and marred," she said.

Chesto spoke about the holiness of family life and parenting during a workshop for parents at Guardian Angels Parish Center, 2061 E. Henrietta Road, on Saturday, March 11. About 80 parents and 26 children attended the workshop, sponsored by the Diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis in support of the synodal goal of lifelong faith formation.

A Connecticut resident, Chesto is the creator of F.I.R.E. — Family-Centered Intergenerational Religious Education. The program uses a variety of parish-based and home activities, including games, discussions and simulations, for family-catechetical purposes.

Such activities are crucial to a child's faith development, Chesto said, citing a



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Dr. Kathleen O'Connell Chesto, a nationally recognized family catechist, speaks to children who joined their parents for a March 11 parenting workshop at Henrietta's Guardian Angels Parish Center.

study in the 1970s indicating that the greatest influence on people of faith was the love they witnessed between their parents.

Chesto added that the involvement of their fathers and mothers in religion ranked second and third, respectively, in importance to people with faith.

Yet, many families do not recognize their call to holiness because it has long been the province of such people in the

church as clergy and religious, she said.

Nonetheless, in her talk at Guardian Angels, Chesto explained that many parents already have the qualifications the church looks for in the deceased souls it often considers for sanctification.

For example, to be canonized, a person must have at least three miracles ascribed to their intercession, she noted.

"Families have lots of miracles," she said, adding that she had three children

of her own, each a miracle qualifying her for canonization.

She also pointed out that the church's religious and clergy have mimicked family life in their observance of the Liturgy of Hours, formerly known as the Divine Office. The Liturgy of the Hours is the church's official cycle of daily prayer, consisting of the early morning Matins; Lauds at dawn; Prime (first hour) at 6 a.m.; Terce (third hour) at 9 a.m.; Sext (sixth hour) at noon; None (ninth hour) at 3 p.m.; Vespers at dusk; and Compline before retiring.

Chesto asked her audience if any of these times sounded familiar, and several pointed out their correspondence to feeding times for infants.

"The church, in her infinite wisdom, said that these are the holy hours, and that the mommies and daddies should not be the only ones up at these hours," she remarked with a smile.

She added that St. John of the Cross wrote about the dark night of the soul, which he equated to a lack of spiritual consolations, an experience many parents have had.

"I have sat by the side of a very ill child all night long, and I prayed to a God who didn't seem to give an answer," she noted.

"There isn't a parent who's been a parent for six or seven years who hasn't had many a dark night of the soul," she continued. "This is what makes us holy."

To learn more about F.I.R.E., please write Sheed & Ward, P.O. Box 419492, Kansas City, Mo. 64141.

Missionary

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Chicago and began talking to such women directly. They bluntly told her where she could go, Gateley said, until they realized she was neither a police officer, a fellow prostitute, nor a journalist.

"The prostitutes were not threatened by me because I had nothing," she said. "The very thing that was my emptiness became my strength because the prostitutes were unthreatened by me."

She spent 14 months following prostitutes around and learning about their

harsh lives, particularly dwelling on the fact that 94 percent of them had been sexually abused as children.

She also learned, ironically, that it was Chicago's respectable citizens — teachers, politicians and doctors — who most frequently patronized these women, she said, each of them adding his own thread of pain to the pattern of exploitation and abuse first woven when the prostitutes were children.

Gateley founded Genesis House, in part, to "provide crying places where women who have been so broken can cry in safety," she said.

In conclusion, Gateley urged audience

members to take whatever spiritual risks they feel called to by God and pointed to the success of her ministries as examples of what God can do with their own lives.

"God will move mountains if only we dare to move to the edge of the cliff," she said.

EDITORS' NOTE: For information on the Volunteer Missionary Movement, please write to 5980 W. Loomis, Greendale, Wis. 53129, or call 414/423-8660.

For information on Genesis House, please write to 911 W. Addison, Chicago, Ill. 60613, or call 312/281-3917.

Sanctuary

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Lake Avenue Baptist Church, the Rochester Society of Friends and Temple B'rith Kodesh.

The Gomezes arrived in June, 1984. A former union official, Alejandro Gomez had been tortured and his life threatened because of his union activities.

In January, 1985, Alejandro and his wife Leticia were arrested as part of a nationwide sweep of Sanctuary workers and refugees. Alejandro was arrested again in May, 1986, as a national security risk. Bail was placed at \$50,000. Within 24 hours, the money was raised, and he was released from jail.

But as the trial went on, it became clear that despite the strength of Alejandro's case, he was likely to lose, Sister Weider said. Local organizers were advised to get the Gomezes to Canada before the trial's end.

The committee's work did not end with their departure, Mott said. Instead, it shifted toward helping refugees resettle. The civil war's end has lessened the need for the committee, however.

"We thought it was better to end it after all we had done," Mott concluded. "Our basic mission was done."

Aquinas

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Joseph B. Knapp, Aquinas spokesman. He added that the principal will now be freer to concentrate on other areas of school life.

Father Dennis P. Noelke, CSB, principal, said he will resign his position at the end of the school year. The Basilian priest will be replaced by a new principal, he said.

"There is hope that there will be a Basilian principal, but that's not guaranteed," Father Noelke commented.

He explained that it was standard procedure in the Basilian order for its members to leave administrative positions whenever an institution has created a major new administrative post. He added that the Basilians will continue to serve Aquinas.

Last October, Father Noelke suspended Father Joseph M. Lanzalaco, CSB, an Aquinas teacher who had publicly called for the resignation of the school's board of trustees. Father Lanzalaco had claimed that the board had not consulted the Basilians during the process to establish a president's office — a claim subsequently refuted by Fa-

ther Lanzalaco's superiors. The priest resigned his position at Aquinas after his suspension and returned to a teaching position in Indiana.

The post of president, originally slated for establishment last fall, was tabled last June after the Basilians, who have traditionally staffed the school, raised concerns about the scope of the new post. In the March 7 press release, however, Father Robert J. Barringer, the order's superior general, announced the Basilians' support for the new position, noting that the Basilians at Aquinas will continue to serve "the good of the students at the school ..."

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