

# Education

## Children connect with Christ at camp in Tier

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Fun and games aren't usually mentioned in the same breath as the Bible.

That is, unless you've been a participant in the Vacation Bible Camp at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

As far as camp director Eileen Sokolowski is concerned, a curriculum laced with excitement is a perfect ingredient in a young Catholic's faith life.

"This really shakes things up. It goes against the grain of traditional Catholic teaching, but it's not *against* Catholic teaching," asserted Sokolowski, who also serves as religious-education coordinator at Our Lady of Lourdes.

The second annual camp took place July 17-21 at Holy Family Intermediate School, located on the Our Lady of Lourdes campus. Seventy-five children ages 3-11, with the assistance of 27 adult and teenage staff members, participated at a cost of only \$15 per camper.

Enthusiasm ran particularly high in the school gymnasium, where classes took turns belting out a variety of upbeat Christian recordings. In fact, one set of youngsters had so much fun singing "Jesus' Kids" that they clamored for it to be to be re-played three times — and were obliged.

In other parts of the gym, youths flung around brightly decorated Frisbees — displaying the words "Praise Jesus" — which they'd created during the camp's arts-and-crafts portion. Campers also designed their very own camp T-shirts.

Outdoors, participants enjoyed offbeat activities such as "water-balloon shot put" and a competition to see which team could dissolve an antacid tablet the fastest by using small paper cups of water drawn out of a bucket.

For the pre-kindergarten set, traditional games such as duck-duck-goose and musical chairs were popularly received.

The camp, however, wasn't strictly limited to fun and games. Students also gathered daily in classrooms to focus on various Bible passages and their significance.

For instance, a group of chil-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Amy Parks (left) instructs her class on the Bible story of David and Goliath July 20 during the second-annual Our Lady of Lourdes Vacation Bible Camp in Elmira.

dren entering grades 3-4 pondered the story of David and Goliath, examining modern-day "giants" they face such as drug abuse and illness. That group ended its session by offering prayers for several people: a schoolmate who died; a cousin with leukemia; an aunt who has cancer; a great-great aunt who's 90 years old; a grandmother who's lonely; and "a prayer to God for making us all be here today."

When asked what parts of the camp they enjoyed the most, three young Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners offered varied responses.

"I like to play recreation and all the games with everyone," said Emily Galvin, 7.

"I like making the shirts," remarked Jenna Gifford, 9.

"I like everything!," stated Nate Hakes, 9.

Meanwhile, "recreation and



Caroline Le Valley puts her hands together in prayer to begin the day's activities July 20.

music" were the favorite activities of 9-year-old Dylan Danko, while his brother Jamie, 6, also enjoyed music class. Both are parishioners at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Elmira's East-side Catholic Parish cluster.

"Snacks and doing coloring" ranked high on the enjoyment list for Danny Riffel, 4, who attends Northside Community Church. His sister Maggie, 5, also attended the camp.

Campers came from several Elmira churches, not all Catholic. Sokolowski estimated that 20 percent of the campers represented faith communities other than Catholic.

"Our goal isn't to have this tunnel vision where we say, 'Being Catholic is the only way.' The goal is to help children see the presence of God in their lives in a fun way," Sokolowski remarked. "And they really responded."

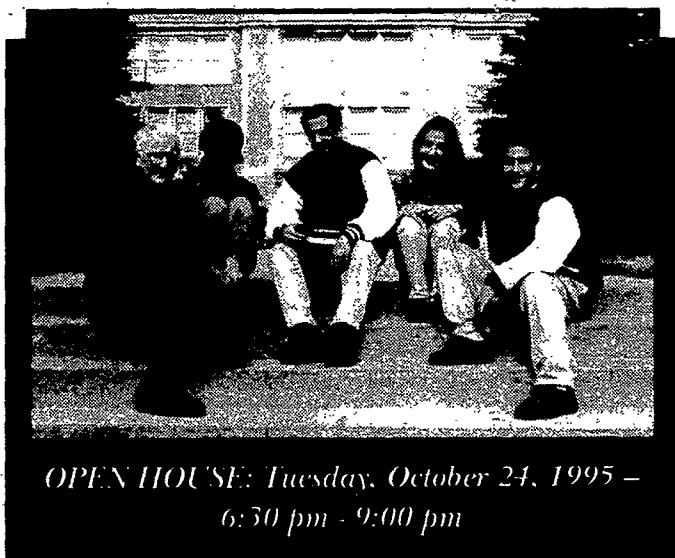
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