

*A child shall lead them*



# St. Lawrence students act out vespers

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

GREECE — Rose Petrella remembers that when she was growing up and attending a Catholic school in Rochester, life could be intimidating in the lower grades.

"Back then we were scared of the older kids," she said with a chuckle.

St. Lawrence School, however, will leave a far different impression on her children, she said, noting the school's emphasis on building bridges between older and younger kids.

"The little ones feel part of the school even though they're little," said Petrella, who has a son, Luciano, in first grade, another son, Nicholas, in third, and a daughter, Kristin, in fourth.

Petrella's statement was exemplified vividly Dec. 9, when about 800 people attended Advent vespers at St. Lawrence Church. The entire communal prayer ritual, titled "Holy Darkness, Blessed Night" was put on by 280 students from St. Lawrence School's grades one through eight.

The students were assigned different roles for the evening prayer; some sang in a song chorus, others recited texts in a speaking chorus, while still others interpreted the texts through bodily movement. Lectors, prayer leaders, readers and a commentator led their fellow students through the ceremony, which the school's principal said was the fourth of its kind in as many years.

"Our school has a long tradition of combining religion and the performing arts," said Sister Diane Dennie, SSJ, principal. "This was just another way of combining song and dance and prayer."

But what really stood out to observers of the vespers was the pairing off and interaction between older students and younger students as "interpreters."

"If we called them 'dancers' we couldn't get the boys to do it," Sister Dennie said jokingly.

Dressed in blue robes, the taller junior high pupils led their elementary school partners, dressed in white robes, through a series of choreographed movements designed to physically illustrate various phrases in the hymns.

"It lets you be more of a part of the vespers instead of standing there saying things you were taught to say," said Megan Stutzman, an eighth-grader who was an



Mike Frisk, carrying the incense thurible, leads the procession with Matthew Sydor.

interpreter.

Her classmate and fellow interpreter, Mike Frisk, echoed her comments.

"I think it got the meaning of the songs out to the people instead of just listening to the words," he said.

Mike said he particularly enjoyed working with the school's younger children.

"It was great," he said. "I got to know the first-graders a little better. They looked up to us and we set a good example for them."

Sister Dennie pointed out that St. Lawrence has long broken down barriers between its older and younger students. She noted, for example, that junior high students are regularly matched with younger ones for such various activities as helping the elementary children with their schoolwork. Practicing together for vespers amplifies such older/younger relationships, she said.

"There's a lot more saying 'hi' to

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First- and eighth-graders interpret the Magnificat through dance and gesture.



First-grader Michael DiRisio pauses between movements.



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