

# Education

## Families embrace summer religious education

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Matthew Judge enjoys religious education, but he wasn't wild about the possibility of attending classes at night like many of his peers.

"I didn't really like the sound of it, because evening is the time I like to take a little time off — play a game, relax, read," Matthew, 11, said.

On the other hand, Matthew thought that a two-week summer religious-education program, held by St. Charles Borromeo Church in Greece, "sounded great."

Matthew and his 9-year-old brother, Sean, attended classes at St. Charles in July. Sessions were held five mornings a week, in three-hour blocks.

St. Charles' second-year endeavor is one of several fledgling summer religious-education programs in the diocese. Within the last two years, St. Lawrence Church in Greece, St. Ambrose Church in Irondequoit and Church of the Nativity in Brockport have launched similar efforts.

Margaret Gray, St. Charles' Christian formation administrator, said her parish's summer program was well-received. A total of 184 children, in grades one-eight, attended last month's classes.

These programs have emerged from workshops conducted over the past two years by Mary Britton, consultant for the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis.

Britton said she has promoted the summer model to parishes in order to accommodate families who can't easily incorporate traditional religious-education programs — held on weekday evenings or weekend mornings during the school year — into their schedules.

"The lifestyle of the families has changed a great deal, and the children's lifestyles have changed. They have so many choices," Britton said.

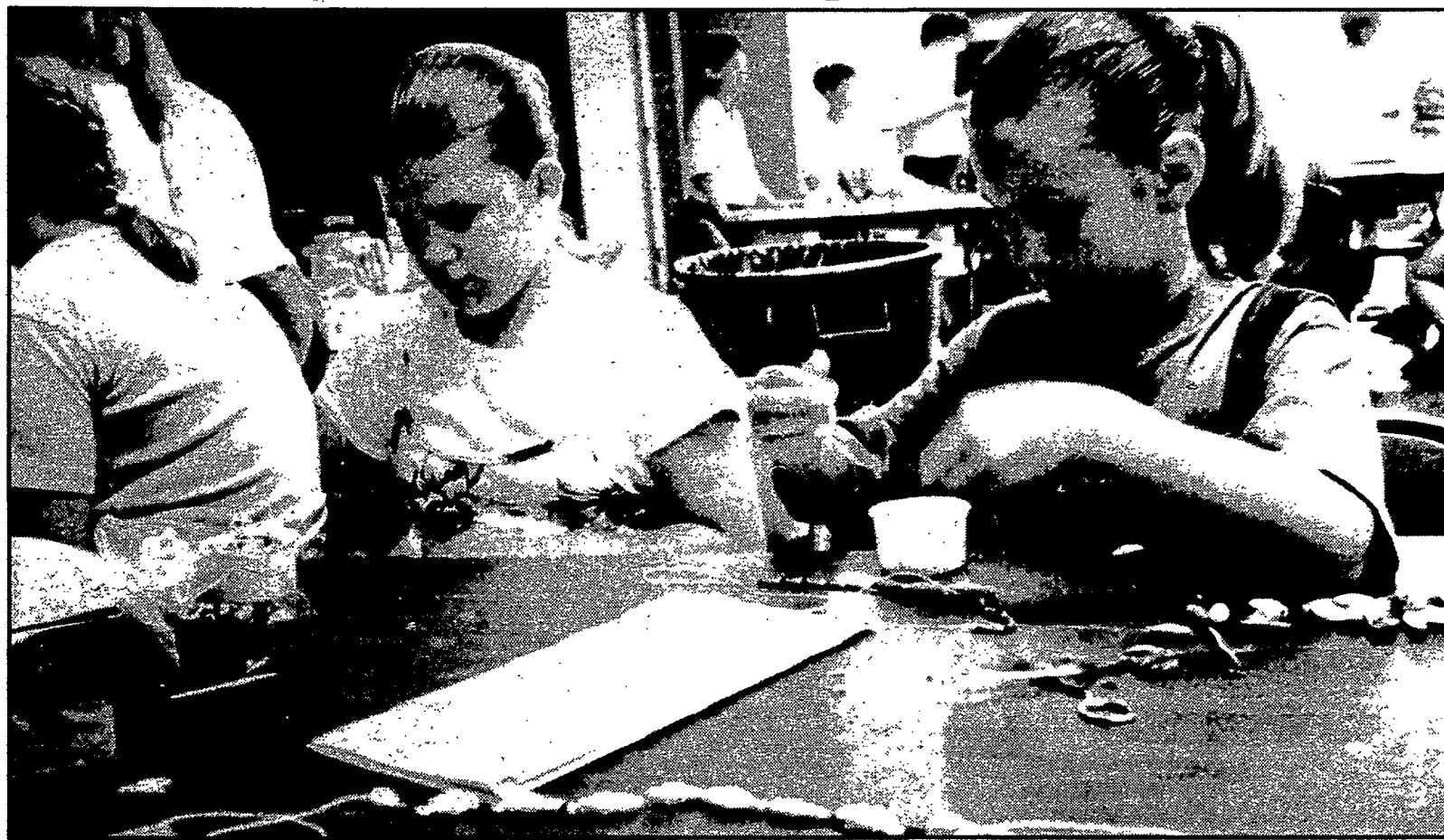
Yet Matthew's mother, Holly, noted that summer religious education is perfect for children seeking a cure for summer boredom.

"They don't have a whole lot going on in the morning," she said.

Gray added that children appear to be fresher for the summer sessions than during the school year.

"You're not getting them after having been in the classroom all day," Gray said.

Britton noted that the pro-



Kerry Huller

Ashley Stanglein (left) and Kara Carnahan make rosaries during an art class at St. Charles Borromeo summer religious education program, July 16, in Greece.

gram meets diocesan requirements and features "exactly the same curriculum as during the school year." Maribeth Mancini, diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis, added that the 30 hours of class time are equivalent to what students would log in a once-a-week program spread out over several months.

Mancini and Holly Judge remarked that the three-hour classes allow students to go more in-depth on subject matter than one-hour sessions would allow.

"You could study parts of the Mass and plan a liturgy," Mancini said.

"Stretched out over half the school year, I don't think it's structured as strongly," Judge commented.

Mancini emphasized that summer religious education should not be confused with Vacation Bible Schools. Those programs, she said, are "a supplement to a year-long program and not based on diocesan curriculum."

According to Britton, the first parish in this diocese to implement summer religious education was St. Helen's Church in

Gates in the late 1980s. Holy Ghost Church, also in Gates, has adopted a similar program. The two parishes now offer summer religious education on alternating weeks and allow children from both parishes to cross-register.

"If they can't attend it at one place, they can go to the other," said Sister Patricia Flass, SSJ, religious-education director at St. Helen's.

Britton said she hopes other parishes will consider offering joint summer programs as well. At the same time, Britton cautioned that children should at-



Ann Mangefrida looks over a poster children presented with the gifts at a prayer service at St. Charles Borromeo Church, July 16.

they worship in," Britton said.

Mancini said that summer religious education is still only available in a small percentage of parishes because many regular instructors have full-time job commitments.

"Where do you get people in the morning for three hours a day? That's a big commitment. It's a huge commitment, really," Mancini said.

"The tradition has been that when the school year ends, most religious-education coordinators kind of stop for the summer," Gray added.

On the positive side, Britton pointed out, summer programs "leave the rest of the year for the catechetical leader to do family-style religious education."

For example, Gray said she can now devote more time to such efforts as St. Charles' Family Enrichment Program, in which families discuss religious themes and work on special projects on Sunday afternoons.

"This allows me to do things during the year I might not have been able to do otherwise," Gray said.

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