

Parenting & Family Life

Moms, tots pray 'n play in churches

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

It's pretty rare to see a baby at a spiritual workshop on prayer.

But after clearing it with Sister Dolores Monahan, SSJ, one mother did take her baby to such a presentation a few years ago.

Sister Monahan, the presenter, recalled her surprise at noticing that the baby seemed to understand what she was talking about.

"The baby would fall asleep, then wake up and tune back in," she contended, though with a chuckle.

Later, Sister Monahan discovered that other mothers, too, wanted to be able to bring their preschoolers to spirituality presentations. So she designed a program just for them: "Pray 'n Play."

Sister Monahan's idea was to bring mothers together "for a bit more formal prayer, and to help them see in their everyday lives there can be prayer, and in the midst of that there can be awareness of God," she said. "From what I heard, they were feeling guilty that they didn't have the time to pray as they felt they should."

Pray 'n Play meets from 3:30 to 5 p.m. every other Tuesday at St. Stephen's Parish religious education center in Geneva. A \$5 donation is requested. Anywhere from one to six mothers have attended, with two to 12 children.

The mothers meet in a casual room from which they can see their children playing in an adjoining room. From time to time the children walk back and forth, to see what their mothers are up to.

"While the adults are praying and reflecting and have faith sharing time together, the children play, listen to stories and have snack time," Sister Monahan said. She shares her time with each group, and noted the children play well together while she's with the mothers.

St. Stephen's parishioner Mary Ann



Lynne Crawford talks with son Jonathan, 2, during a Play and Pray snack break at St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua, earlier this fall. Greg Francis/Staff photograph

Bradley has been a devoted Pray 'n Play-goer since the first meeting in 1995.

The mother of seven children, she takes her three youngest, ages 2-6, and also two children she cares for. They look forward to their visits with "Sister 'Lores," she said.

"I wish it was every week, even," she said. "I'm so glad Sister Dolores came up with this program. It gives me so much a sense of peace and renewal."

She keeps every worksheet from the sessions, each of which has a theme, questions to think about, and prayers written by Sister Monahan.

"The integral part for me is the prayer," Bradley said. "The little prayers she has seem to fit in so well with what's going on."

She shared a favorite: "Dear Jesus, Help me to look to you especially during this season of autumn / Be with me during my Thanksgiving and times of expectant

waiting for you to deepen your life with me / As the leaves color and surrender, help me to remember that you call me to that same kind of surrender / that same letting go that opened me to your workings in my heart."

Bradley said she also uses Sister Monahan's worksheet notes to reflect between meetings.

"She has been such a guiding force for me," Bradley said.

Mothers from other area churches have attended — and a father, as well. All are welcome, according to Sister Monahan.

Ironically, a woman at St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua, unaware of Pray 'n Play, started a "Play and Pray" program this year, also for mothers and children.

Play and Pray got its start after Anne Zimmerman moved to town with her husband Eric and two daughters. In Colorado they participated in such a group at their church, she said. Seeing nothing

similar at St. Mary's, she offered to start Play and Pray.

"It's for fellowship, for kids to find new friends to play with, and for moms to get support from other moms," she said.

With a committee of three other mothers, she plans the gatherings: free time with toys, crafts mothers do with the children, snacks, business (mostly talking about upcoming meetings) and prayer. When they share stories and songs, she said, "We try to bring church teachings in to the stories."

The mothers and children hold hands in a circle and pray at the end, she said.

The group meets for about two hours three times a month, in the basement of the school. The mothers stay with the children in the same room. Usually 10 mothers attend, but some 19 have taken part, she said, including mothers from Victor and Newark.

The group also has gone to Seneca Park Zoo in Rochester and Discovery Zone in Penfield, and toured the local post office. One mother has offered her home for a Christmas party. For Thanksgiving the group planned to decorate a box, fill it with their food donations and give it to the church food drive. Several of the mothers also have enjoyed nights out together for coffee or movies.

"It's nice to talk with other people besides 2-year-olds all day long," Zimmerman said. "I'm hoping I'm fulfilling a need in the community."

The Colorado program wasn't as connected with the church, she said.

"That's why I like this a little bit better," she observed. "We can be involved more with church and let the kids know church is important, as much as we can at this age."

Private Home-Care Services

Providing quality care since 1967.

- 24 hour services, 7 days a week
- Nurses—RN/LPN
- Home Health Aides
- Personal Care Aides
- Companions
- Housekeeping
- Laundry
- Shopping
- Meal Preparation

NYS licensed. All employees are bonded and insured

Rochester
716-242-0070

Canandaigua
716-394-6090

We have established a Caregivers Internet site.

Please visit our web site at:
<http://www.caregivershomecare.com>

+CAREGIVERS

Are Your Investments Working Hard Enough?

8.51%
Annually

Get More, Earn More

Go with experience you can trust...

For 21 positive years... GEN-CAP investors have done better for 5 Great Reasons:

- Regular monthly checks
- No fees or commissions
- Low minimum initial investment ... \$5,000.00
- High yields and capital growth
- Highest total returns



Make a fresh start...RIGHT NOW! 8.51% annually.

Call 1-800-507-4393
Gen-See Capital Corporation

Stepping Stones Learning Center

- Certified Teachers For:
- Mom & Me Playgroup
 - Pre-school Programs
 - Pre-K Program
 - Speech Therapy & Special Education Services
 - Inclusion Opportunities



41 Colebrook Drive (West Irondequoit)

467-4567