

In the eyes of God, all people are the same

It usually happens while I'm sitting at my kitchen table; I get a funny feeling that someone is watching me. I glance out my casement window, into the picture window across the street and discover the source of my suspicion.

A white curtain in the picture window is drawn back and lifted like a woman gathering her flowing skirt. It reveals the faces of four, five or six children whose dark eyes brighten as we make contact across the great divide of our busy street. The children's voices holler cheerfully out the open window, "Hola! Where are your children? What are you going to do today?"

No matter how many times this scene is repeated, it's a sight I always welcome. The children, seven in all, and their parents, left their homeland of El Salvador and settled into our neighborhood about a year ago. For the first few months after the Alvarez family moved in, we exchanged pleasant greetings each time we passed. We welcomed the family with food, housewarm-



By EILEEN MARX

family matters

ing gifts and a present for the new baby. As the months went by, I thought I was being a model neighbor until my son, Bobby, asked one day, "Mom, how come the kids from across the street have never come over to our house to play?"

"How come?" I wondered myself. Was language our only barrier? The next day I took my two children across the street and knocked at the Alvarez door. Ilsa, Dina, Juan, Axa, Abner and Samuel met us at the door and invited us into the living room

so we could talk with their mother, Maria. I began speaking to Maria in Spanish, and my Spanish was rusty to say the least. All the children convulsed in laughter at the sound of Bobby's and Teresa's mommy speaking Spanish. "You sound so funny!" they all laughed.

A few minutes later all the kids disappeared upstairs to play on a colorful hammock that the family had brought with them from El Salvador. As Maria and I listened to the children squealing with delight upstairs, we both smiled. It seems that children play the same in every language. And, downstairs, as we talked about the children's bee stings, past pregnancies and the local school, it was clear that mothers everywhere speak the same language too.

Since that afternoon, our children often play together. My family has received the extraordinary gift of the culture, the spirit and friendship of this Hispanic family.

Our lives have also been enriched with the rich diversity of Hispanic, African American, Asian and American children who attend my children's elementary school. Through the school's special programs, curriculum and celebrations, there is a respect and openness to children of all cultures, races and religions. I remember when my son's class celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with a fiesta in the classroom. It was a real delight listening to Bobby's description of the food they tasted, the music they danced to and the people they learned about.

"I know how to count to 10 in Spanish," Bobby reported. "I ate this kind of banana that was pretty good. And 'Hola' means 'Hello!'"

As children of different cultures play and learn side by side, they gain an appreciation for their differences and an understanding of what unites them. Our greatest hope for ridding our society of racism, in-

tolerance and mistrust is when programs like these are reinforced in the home.

I recall a conversation I once had with Father Francisco Gonzalez, coordinator for Hispanic Family Life Ministry in the Archdiocese of Washington, about the struggles that many Hispanic families face when they first arrive in the United States.

"It is the story of every immigrant culture," Father Gonzalez said. "There is a change in the whole structure of the family. The children have the better opportunity to learn the language through programs at their school. They are learning a language and being exposed to a culture that's different from their parents and grandparents. The children are often the link with the outside world. Inside the family, the roles of parent and child are firmly established but outside the family, the roles of parent and child are sometimes reversed. As a result, security does not always exist for family members as it had in the past."

During the past few months, the Alvarez family has been a gentle reminder to me that there are times in all our lives when we need to draw back the curtains and open the doors of our hearts and our homes to the newcomers in our midst. To live the Gospel is to believe that when we welcome the stranger, we are welcoming Jesus.

As Father Gonzalez said, "The church has a unique responsibility to combine the spiritual care of the Hispanic family with their basic needs to feel welcome, to find a job, to settle in a home and to receive an education. In the eyes of God we are all the same. God did not create any borders. He placed the earth in the hands of people from all cultures to work together to build up the kingdom of God."

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

Families should set priorities

Asked about the time crunch many families face today, family therapist Dennis Boike quoted General Omar Bradley.

"It's time we follow the morning star rather than being guided by the lights of each passing ship," Boike said.

Boike pointed out that the reality is many families find themselves being distracted by "passing ships" — to the detriment of family life.

"The key issue that people are having is that they keep increasing the number of things they are doing without taking anything off the pile," noted

Boike will be conducting workshops for catechists and youth leaders Oct. 6 on the theme "The Family Time Bind: Myths, Realities and Priority Management."

Although the workshops are aimed at church professionals, he noted that he will be covering lessons any family can use.

First, he said, "People are going to have to decide where they are going to put their time, consciously."

Second, families need to prioritize which activities they will pursue, and, consequently, which ones they will have to give up.

He advised that each person first determine what his or her priorities are, then that couples and parents discuss priorities between themselves, and finally that the entire family talk about what they want to make the family priorities.

He also advised that these priorities be written down.

"When we write down what we are going to do, we are 80 percent more likely to achieve it than if we don't," he said.

Finally, he suggested that people find support groups to help them keep to their priorities.

Families must simply face reality, Boike acknowledged.

"One of the things we tell people in our society is that we can do anything we want. But we can't," he declared. "There are time limitations."



family events

● **SAT, SEPT. 19** — Ventriloquist and singer Evie Scott; The Eleventh Hour storytime: 11 a.m.; Border's Books, 1000 Hylan Drive, Rochester, free; call 716/292-5000.

● **SEPT. 19, OCT. 17** — Make a Scarecrow days: 1-3 p.m.; Cumming Nature Center, Gulick Road, South Bristol; bring overalls, flannel shirt, stuffing materials provided; \$3 per child, plus center entry fee (Rochester Museum & Science Center members and preschoolers free, students \$1.50, seniors and college students \$3, adults \$4); call 716/374-6160.

● **SUN, SEPT. 20** — Birds of Prey Day: hawks, owls, vultures on display, plus programs and demonstrations; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Genesee Country Nature Center, Flint Hill Road, Mumford; \$11 for adults, \$9.50 seniors and students, \$6.50 children 4-16, children under 4 free; for information call 716/538-6822.

● **WED, SEPT. 23, 30** — Story time: featuring *Little Gorilla by Ruth Borsari* (Sept. 23) and *I Went Walking by Sue Williams* (Sept. 30); 11 a.m.; Barnes and Noble Bookstore, 3349 Monroe Ave., Rochester; free; for information call 716/586-6020.

● **WED, SEPT. 23, 30** — Tiny Tot Story Time: *Tiny Tiny Mouse A Book About Colors* (Sept. 23) and play program by Gymboree (Sept. 30); 11

a.m.; Borders Books, 1000 Hylan Drive, Rochester; call 716/292-5000.

● **FRI, SEPT. 25** — Pajama party: and story time; featuring *Come Along Daisy* by Jane Simmons; 7 p.m.; Barnes and Noble Book Store, 3349 Monroe Ave., Rochester; call 716/586-6020.

● **FRI, SEPT. 25** — Juice and Jammies: with Janis Primrose and a costume "slizzard," plus reading of *The Slizzard Gardener*; 7 p.m.; Barnes & Noble Bookstore, Greece; children wearing pajamas receive a poster; free.

● **SAT, SEPT. 26** — Family dance workshop: parents and children; 1:30-2:30 p.m. ages 4-7, 2:30-3:30 ages 18-30 months; \$20 per family; Park Avenue Dance Company, Rochester; for more information, call 716/461-2766.

● **SUN, SEPT. 27** — Awesome Autumn Celebration: hay rides, fiddle music, storytelling, animals; 11 a.m.-4 p.m.; Mendon Ponds Nature Center, 3914 Glover St., Honeoye Falls; for information call 716/334-3780.

● **SEPT. 26-27, OCT. 3-4, 10-11** — Harvest Days: sawmill demonstrations, music, timber sports competitions, etc.; 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Cumming Nature Center, Gulick Road, South Bristol; free with center fee of \$1.50 for students, \$3 for seniors and college students, \$4 for adults, free for preschoolers.

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