

## FEATURE

## Synod fueled growth of adult-education options

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

Having recently retired, Joe Flanigan has some extra time on his hands — but he doesn't care for much of the television fare these days. So he's happy that St. Alphonsus and Holy Family parishes in Auburn have recently expanded their offerings of religious videos.

"Anything I can take advantage of — I'd rather do that," said Flanigan, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church, Auburn.

Flanigan also enjoyed a two-week block of adult education seminars at yet another Auburn parish, Sacred Heart, over the summer. He took classes on dream interpretation, spiritual direction and the Myers-Briggs personality test.

"There was unbelievably good stuff," Flanigan said.

Maribeth Mancini, diocesan director of evangelization and catechesis, said that the Sacred Heart program is a creative response by parishes to the 1993 Synod goal of lifelong faith formation. In addition, Mancini noted, numerous parishes have expanded their discussion-group offerings as well as their video and religious-publication libraries.

Mancini said that the Synod, as well as the Second Vatican Council, have voiced a strong need for ongoing education.

"Religious education is not over when you graduate from eighth grade or high school, or are confirmed," Mancini said.

Beginning in 1995, Mancini's office has distributed "Living Catholic in Today's World," a series of articles for adults pertaining to faith and family, to parishes.

That same year, St. Bernard's Institute began "St. Bernard's On the Road," a set of seminars on contemporary Catholic issues held across the diocese.

Judy Nichols, pastoral associate at Sacred Heart in Auburn for three years, said her position — about half of which involves adult education — was created as a result of the Synod goal. And Ann Wilkin, faith formation coordinator at Church of the Epiphany/St. Rose in Sodus and Sodus Point, said the Synod "gave us the chance to promote something that we knew was necessary anyway."

This promotion is occurring through a Bible class run by Wilkin, Father Dave Faraone, pastor, and Deacon Ed Sergeant, parish deacon. Wilkin also plans to offer a four-part series on the history of the Catholic Church this fall.

Many programs targeted at adults, such as missions and Bible study, are held during Lent and Advent. However, Nichols offered substantial fare over the summer at Sacred Heart in Auburn. From July 12-16 and July 19-23, adult classes took place in the morning to coincide with the children's religious-education program.

"What we learned from it is that people are interested in workshops on spirituality and spiritual direction, more than the didactic approach," Nichols said.

In fact, Nichols said, about 10 people who took the dream interpretation workshop would like to form a weekly group.

One stumbling block for adult education is finding suitable times to schedule programs. Nichols said that while she was pleased with attendance at the summer program, she found that many parents



Mike Mergen/Photo Intern

**In a mock spiritual direction exercise, Marge Gorman, an OSF associate, left, speaks with Sister Marise May, OSF, at Sacred Heart School in Auburn July 24. About 15 people gathered to hear Sister May, of Syracuse, discuss spiritual direction.**

were working and could not attend. She plans to host a series of seminars next year, but will likely schedule them on evenings and weekends.

And even in the evenings, Wilkin said, adults may have constraints at home.

"The biggest problem is, the parents are busy," she said.

One potential solution, Mancini said, is for the diocese to offer adult education via computer.

"I would love to see us develop the Net (Internet) more," Mancini said.

Another challenge is presenting quality programs with limited staff. For instance, Barbara Mearse is beginning her second year as volunteer RCIA coordinator at St. James in Trumansburg, Holy Cross in Ovid and St. Francis Solanus in Interlaken. She said the parishes have virtually no paid staff members and that RCIA was previously done individually with parish priests

— so to even have a class of five people was a step forward.

"It was enormously satisfying. The group was wonderful," Mearse said.

Mearse said that the three parishes are continuing to explore such areas as Bible study and video discussion groups. That is fine with Mancini, who said there are many approaches a parish can take to adult education.

"Not everybody's lives are the same," Mancini said.

For instance, adult education can occur in an intergenerational setting. Mancini said the diocese now asks parents to take a greater role in their children's religious education and sacramental preparation.

Wilkin takes somewhat of a reverse approach at her parish, saying youths are welcome at adult-education programs.

"We always invite teens because we find that they're very capable," she said.

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