

FEATURE



Andres Dixon/Staff photographer

Carla Lemik, a first-grade teacher at St. Rita's School, Webster, helps Thomas Wight try to think of something to write in his faith journal during religion class on Jan. 27.

Journals enable pupils to nurture strong faith



First-grader Jennifer Volo colors a picture for her faith journal.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

WEBSTER — When asked what exactly a "faith journal" was, Nick Tarana, a 6-year-old first-grader at St. Rita's School was not at a loss for words.

"It's like a big brown thing, and we like draw pictures and things in there, and we hang them up on the things that we got them from," he said.

Readers should note that "the big brown thing" is a manila envelope, and "the things that we got them from" are the

hooks upon which the envelopes hang on a wall in Nick's classroom. Otherwise, his description is pretty much on the money.

Nick proudly displayed for his visitor the contents of his faith journal, which included a picture of a heart with a woman's face on it. The picture was inscribed, "Thank you God for Mom." Nick noted that he created the artwork after he and his fellow students had talked about gratitude to God.

Nick's teacher, Carla M. Lemik, has been encouraging the boy and his 26 fellow students to create the faith journals all year.

"I had read about it one time from somewhere, and I thought it was a nice thing to get them in touch with God, to get them closer to God," Lemik said.

Three or four times a month, she said, she discusses a spiritual topic with the children during religion class and then asks them to create something for their faith journal. The students are not graded on their journals, she said.

"It's between them and God," she said. She added that topics have included the children's favorite places to pray as well as a number of other subjects.

Renee Pilato, also 6, displayed a picture she had drawn of a family tree with pictures of members of her family on the branches.

"I like to be nice to my family, so I made my family tree so that I could pray to my family because I remember that God created my family," she said.

"What's a family tree?" Nick asked.

Renee proceeded to explain the tree, adding that each person on a branch experiences something significant.

"Whoever lives there goes on forever," she said.

Missionary awareness day enlightens Newark students

By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

On the one hand, Marian Carney-Ryan said, entering a religious vocation and/or doing missionary work is "kind of a far-off thing" for elementary-school students.

By the same token, she emphasized, it's important to plant a seed at a young age.

"I think it's good to get them started thinking about it," said Carney-Ryan, a former overseas missionary.

Which is precisely why Kathleen Peters organized a "Mission Day" on Jan. 26 at St. Michael's School in Newark, where she serves as principal.

"Just talk to most priests. They'll tell you they knew by second, third, fourth grade they were going to be a priest," Peters said.

Carney-Ryan and seven other adults spoke in conjunction with the Wayne County school's week-long focus on missions. They made their presentations to 320 St. Michael's students in grades pre-K through eight.

Catholic organizations represented on Jan. 26 were the Maryknolls (Carney-Ryan); Jesuits (Father John Carriero, SJ, teacher at McQuaid Jesuit High School); Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester (Sister Kay Foos); Rochester Sisters of Mercy (Sister Kathleen Wayne); Felician Sisters of Buffalo (Sister Mary Therese); and Catholic Charities (the Finger Lakes' Scarlett Emerson and the Diocese of Rochester's Sister Janet Korn, SSJ). Also appearing was Terri Hannan of Geneva, who traveled with a lay missionary medical group to aid flood victims in Honduras.

In addition, Father Michael Cody of Boston, representing the Columban Fathers, gave a presentation Jan. 27 at St. Michael's. He was delayed by one day due to poor weather. Despite a snowstorm, Peters noted, only one speaker couldn't attend (from the Franciscan Workers in Syracuse).

Peters noted that as a teacher and principal, she has consistently stressed the importance of missionary work to

students. But this year, she said, she decided to go one step further by contacting numerous religious groups to speak on Jan. 26.

"The students always knew about it, but they didn't experience it," she remarked.

The event also gave children a more widespread view of the Catholic Church at work, Peters added.

"One main part is to show that the church is worldwide," she remarked.

Sister Korn, who spoke on behalf of both Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services, agreed that this kind of awareness-raising helps enlighten young people about cultures "beyond their own scene."

Carney-Ryan, in her talk, recalled the three years she and her husband spent in Tanzania, one of the poorest countries in Africa. She told the St. Michael's students about how she taught natives and learned Swahili.

"The (St. Michael's) kids were very receptive. They seemed into it," said Carney-Ryan, a parishioner at St. Paul's Church in Webster. "It's good to educate people about the fact that there are other people out there who need help."

Fourth-graders Caitlyn McKechney and Theo Babasidas said they were intrigued by Sister Foos, a former missionary in Brazil, who told students of her efforts to aid poor residents there.

"She helped build houses for people who were out in the rain forest. I thought it was very hard for them," said Caitlyn, 9.

"She brought the hats they used to wear, and showed us pictures," said Theo, 10. Both he and Caitlyn attend church at St. Ann's in Palmyra.

Meanwhile, fifth-grader Nick Schwind said that Sister Korn told memorable tales about her 15 years of missionary service in the Santiago, Chile, area.

"They brought Christ to (the natives)," said Nick, 11. "She said the people there had to share a lot, like invite each other for dinner and share their food. I found it interesting what it must be like to be poor, and not living in such expensive houses."

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