

PARENTING

Faith in the family is heart of sessions

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

At St. Francis de Sales Parish in Geneva, religious formation builds family values by valuing the family. That's how Bev Guerrie, religious formation coordinator, sees it.

For the past five years, the parish has occasionally held a two-hour Sunday "Family Gathering Session." The session replaces regular morning catechetical classes between Masses for children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The innovative sessions feature such subjects as the saints, angels and Lent, and family learning activities, Guerrie said.

"Family-centered catechesis offered in this fashion allows everyone to not only learn about their faith, but to celebrate it," she said. "I just like to bring out everyone's creativity. It's just the idea of bringing something new and fresh to the program."

Sessions begin with an opening prayer in the church, followed by remarks by catechetical leaders on the central theme, Guerrie said. She noted that sometimes such parish groups as the Rosary Society help develop the topic, and students present anything from skits to songs related to it. The theme for the latest session, March 26, centered on the sacraments of initiation — baptism, confirmation and holy Eucharist.

Jeanne Colopietro teaches religion to first-graders, and has four children herself in the parish's formation program. Sometimes it's easier to get children, especially older students, to sing in front of their parents rather than do skits, she noted.

"If they're singing, they're not as nervous," she said. "They're enjoying themselves."

She added that having the children perform for their parents builds the kids' self-esteem.

"It gives them a sense of achievement to show their parents exactly what they've learned," she said.

In the basement of the parish's former school building, the kids and their folks share an educational activity, Guerrie said. For example, she said, last month each family filled out worksheets inscribed with the name of a sacrament by coming up with a word starting with each letter of the sacrament. One family took the word "confirmation" and came up with such words as "Catholic," "family" and "trinity."

That interaction with the parents is so important," she said. "Otherwise (the gathering session) becomes a 'show-and-tell,' and we don't want that."

Colopietro added that the interactive portion of the session creates fond memories for the children about their religious formation.

"When you're doing it with your parents, it just means more to your child because it has a lasting impact," she said.

Sue Gage, who teaches second-graders religion and has a son and daughter in the



John Powell

Children perform during a Family Gathering Session at St. Francis de Sales Church in Geneva on March 26. Parents and children together renewed their baptismal vows at the end of the service.

formation program, added that parents benefit from the interactive portion as well. Talking about church teachings with their children can bring back memories of something they may not have thought about in years — for example, their first holy Communion.

"Learning about religion is not just for the children," she said.

Guerrie also noted that children tend to believe in their faith if they see their parents taking the time to help them learn it.

"If they see their parents getting involved, I think the children will value (the faith) more than if the parents just dropped their children off at church," she said.

Most importantly, in an era when many Catholic children no longer learn about their faith daily through the Catholic school system, participating in her children's religious formation is crucial to its growth, Gage said.

"I went to Catholic schools for 12 years," she said. "I want my children to be touched in the same way."

In the fall, St. Francis will begin doing its faith formation with its fellow Geneva Catholic church, St. Stephen's Parish. The two churches already share the same pastor, Father Roy Kiggins, and various pastoral staff members, and make up the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva. Guerrie said that the family gathering ses-



Jeanne Colopietro holds her daughter, Jamie, 5, who is enthusiastic about participating in a spelling game at the Family Gathering Session at St. Francis de Sales Church.

sions, which have drawn more than 200 people, will swell considerably with the addition of St. Stephen's children. She wondered aloud what the expanded gathering session would look like.

"We aren't quite sure how this will all work in terms of accommodating the amount of people," she said, "but having to worry about too many people is a wonderful challenge to look forward to and, with the Spirit guiding us, we are sure we can make it all happen."

Family Events

© APR. 22, 29, 30, May 6, 7 — **Children's theater:** "The Velveteen Rabbit"; Rochester Children's Theatre, 45 Prince St., Rochester; Sat. 11 a.m., 7 p.m.; Sun. 2 p.m.; adults \$10/\$14; students/seniors \$8/\$9; 716/271-7870.

© APR. 24-28 — **School break:** "Treasures from Trash"; Earth Day performances, activities, Strong Museum, One Manhattan Square, Rochester; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; adults \$6, seniors \$5, children 3-17 \$4; under 3 free; 716/263-2700.

© WED, APR. 26 — **Cool Kids on Campus:** "Mexican and Latin Dance"; Fireside Lounge, off Residence Dr., Seymour Union, SUNY Brockport; 7 p.m.; free; open to public; 716/637-3984.

© WED, APR. 26 — **Atrium concert:** Dance Rochester! performance; City Hall Atrium, 30 Church St., Rochester; 7:30 p.m.; free; 716/872-0466.

© SAT, APR. 29 — **Family day:** "Caring for Creeks"; offered at 11 Monroe County sites; family-oriented, outdoor, hands-on, feet-in-water-related activities; free; pre-registration required; for information call Rochester Area Community Foundation 716/271-4100.

© WED, MAY 3 — **Wednesdays for Tots:** Gary the Happy Pirate; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Square, Rochester; 10, 11 a.m.; advance ticket payment required; 716/263-2701, ext. 314.

© FRI, MAY 5 — **Showcase:** National Dance Week; Dance Rochester! performance, Nazareth College Arts Center, 4245 East Ave., Rochester; 7 p.m.; advanced sale tickets \$8 adults, \$4 seniors/students; at the door \$10/\$5; 716/389-2170.

© SUN, MAY 7 — **Children's theater:** "Lula Washington Dance Theatre"; Nazareth College Arts Center, 4245 East Ave., Rochester; 4 p.m.; \$24; 716/389-2170.

© TUE, MAY 9 — **Tuesdays for Tots:** clap and sing with Bill Mehls; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Square, Rochester; 10 a.m.; adult \$6, child \$4; advance ticket payment required; 716/263-2701, ext. 314.

© SAT, MAY 13 — **Native American Gardening:** story teller Sue Howard, gardening techniques demonstrations; Children's Garden, Sonnenberg Gardens, Canandaigua; 10 a.m., 2 p.m.; for information call 716/394-4922.

© SUN, MAY 14 — **Mother's Day:** ice cream treat for each mom accompanied by child; gift craft activity; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Square, Rochester; noon-5 p.m.; adult \$6, child \$4; 716/263-2702.

© MAY 27-JULY 1 — **Classes:** "Garden Sprout"; for children ages 6-10; fun gardening, ecology, historic topics; Children's Garden, Sonnenberg Gardens, Canandaigua; meets Saturdays; for information call 716/394-4922.

© **Registration:** Summer Camp Playhouse for ages 8-13, Rochester Children's Theatre, 45 Prince St., Rochester; 716/271-7870.

St. Michael's Homecoming Mass

SUNDAY, APRIL 30TH AT 7 P.M.

Come together with old friends and schoolmates to worship in the rich tradition of your parents and grandparents. Father Vincent Panepinto will preside at an English Mass. The choir from St. Charles Borromeo will perform, accompanied by a 1909 pipe organ. Secured parking will be available in the lot behind the church hall. Mass will be followed by a social hour in the hall. Tours will begin at 5:30 p.m.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

869 Clinton Avenue, North • Rochester, N.Y. • 325-4040

JOSEPH KILMICK, MD announces opening of **Pediatric Practice**
444 White Spruce • Southview Commons
ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS
424-6500

www.catholiccourier.com