

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Auburn woman enjoys Bible school's 'God time'

By Jeanne Kidera
Editorial intern

Who would attempt to find a live lion for a vacation Bible school?

Frances Lane, 64, of St. Mary's in Auburn, that's who. When she couldn't find one for last year's Noah's Ark theme, she used a stuffed tiger instead. She had already brought in live doves and donkeys. This year the Vacation Bible School ran from Aug. 5-10, and for the "Kick-off Night of Fun," Lane brought in a horse, a bunny, a calf and a cockatiel.

Three years ago at a Cayuga County Area Inter-Faith Ministry meeting the Rev. Roy Kettinger of Auburn's First United Methodist Church mentioned that his church ran a vacation Bible school, but it was not very successful. He suggested that perhaps a joint vacation Bible school would be more prosperous. Father Robert J. Schrader of St. Mary's thought it was worth a shot. He turned to Lane for help.

"I belong to parish council, which is why I think I was approached," Lane remarked. "I, being an older Catholic, had never heard of vacation Bible school. I watched a film clip and thought 'I think this is something we can do.' And of course I did a lot of praying."

Lane, who has been a parishioner at St. Mary's for 17 years, said that when she entered the church for the first time it felt like "love surrounding me." She credits St. Mary's with taking her out of the pew and putting her to work. "I've loved it," she remarked. Lane does hospital ministry; is finishing her sixth year on parish council; is a eucharistic minister; serves as an usher; is a member of the Martha Society; and schedules the children's liturgy.

She is a mother of six children, ranging in age from 45 to 22. "I tell people I had six because they didn't give me any free samples when I asked! I love children," she exclaimed. Lane, who always worked part-time until her youngest child was born with Down's syndrome, is also a grandmother of four. Two of her daughters and all four of her grandchildren are involved in the Vacation Bible School, which she calls "a



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo intern

Fran Lane beams on opening night of Vacation Bible School, an ecumenical effort of five churches in Auburn.

family affair."

In this third year of the Vacation Bible School, the number of parishes involved has increased to five. The parishes now also include First Presbyterian Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church and St. Alphonsus Catholic Church, all of Auburn.

"We're trying to get people to live God's Word, and not just drop it in the summertime," Lane said. "We have so much fun, and we make it interesting."

"You can sit in your garden anytime," she added.

Running a Vacation Bible School like the one Lane calls a "mini-vacation" is a great deal of work (planning started in November), but it is also rewarding, she said.

"At the beginning of the week that first year I said 'There's no way I'm doing this again,' but by the end of the week I already knew what I wanted to do the next year to make it even better," Lane said. "We haven't duplicated anything yet."

This year's theme was "Son Creek Junction - The Adventure of Living in God's Family," a Western theme that focused on the Book of Acts.

"I think most people would think Vacation Bible School is stuffy, but it's not,"

Lane stated. While she stressed that the main focus is on God, only 40 minutes out of the two hours are spent in actual Bible study class. "There's so much more, and it's all based on the day's lesson. They have a ball! It's great," she said.

At each of the gatherings, held from 6:15 to 8:30 in the evening to accommodate workday schedules, all participants and volunteers met in the sanctuary and had opening prayer. They then broke off for Bible study, followed by activity sessions, such as music, arts and crafts, or games. In music they learned songs from a vacation Bible school CD. In arts and crafts the youngest children made cowboy hats out of paper, while the older ones made handbags out of jeans.

This year Lane asked the Boy Scouts to help out with the decorations, which included a cardboard Western village scene around the youth fellowship hall. She also set up small covered wagons and hung posters up around the parish.

Lane said that her main goal in working with Vacation Bible School is to make a difference in faith life, giving the children a little more time with their faith and God than they might have outside of Vacation Bible School. She added that another goal she and the other volunteers have is not

having to work so hard on recruiting participants. "I'd like to see people waiting for us," she stated.

The program drew 101 children and 25 adults last year. Classes are offered for 3-year-olds to seventh-graders, and there is an adult group, as well, that has been composed mostly of senior citizens. These numbers don't include the 40 to 50 volunteers from the parishes, anywhere from seventh-graders to senior citizens. This year the staff ordered Vacation Bible School books for older youth in hopes of getting high school and college-age participants, also.

Lane pointed out that there are many benefits to attending or volunteering at a Vacation Bible School. Not only do people get to know each other, but they have fun while learning about God. According to Lane, that is the bottom line. "It's really about getting a little bit of God time," she said.

Lane said Vacation Bible School makes her feel good about her faith and "volunteer" is her official Vacation Bible School position. "If you believe, you can really volunteer. I truly believe in my Jesus," she said. She added that God has been good to her, so she likes to give something back.

And giving back is something she will continue to do. She made a pact with Deb Janish of the First United Methodist Church, Paul Guney of Westminster Presbyterian, Laurie Webster of First Presbyterian, and Marie Venaglia of St. Alphonsus, to keep the Vacation Bible School running for as long as they are capable of doing so. Lane is in it for the long haul. She recently joined a fitness center, after shattering her ankle in March.

"What good parts I have left, I'm gonna keep working," she remarked. Vacation Bible School is one of those many parts.

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