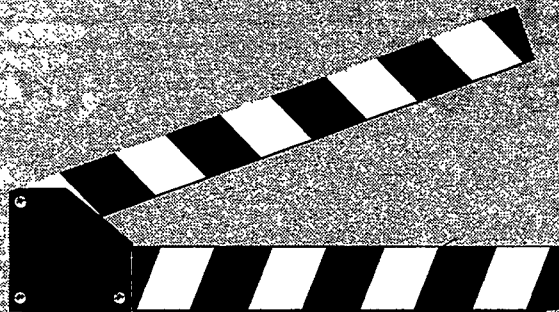


on the MOVIE



Now showing at
Nazareth Academy!
The Wizard of Oz

FINDING faith ON film

Viewing the suspense movie, "The Birds," shortly past 9 a.m. is bound to shake the sleep out of your eyes. And shoot-'em-up scenes from "The Godfather" might make the breakfast in your stomach chum a bit.

These are among the films shown in a theology class at Nazareth Academy — that's right, Alfred Hitchcock and Don Corleone in a religious discussion. The second-year course, titled "Theology and Film," connects popular Hollywood flicks with biblical themes.

For instance, Jamella James said she had never perceived "The Wizard of Oz" as a spiritual journey until Eileen Pollack, the course's teacher, took that slant. Jamella now sees that Dorothy, through her many frightening experiences,

underwent a spiritual transformation that allowed her to discover the importance of family, friends and home.

"Basically, it's what you learned about yourself on a journey you didn't really want to go on," said Jamella, 17.

Meeting three times per week, 21 Nazareth Academy seniors are taking the year-long course. Along with "The Wizard of Oz," "The Birds" and "The Godfather," some of the other film fare includes "The African Queen," "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "West Side Story" and "Superman."

The 80-minute sessions include extensive movie viewing, spirited discussions and frequent replays of scenes so Pollack can drive her points home. During a class held Oct. 26, Pollack harped on opening scenes of "The Godfather": Crime boss Don Corleone discusses murder in a darkly lit room, while outside his daughter's wedding reception is taking place in bright sunlight. Pollack explained to the class that well-lit scenes denote security, virtue, truth and joy, while darkness is connected with fear, evil and the unknown.

"That's in the Bible. God is light and God is love," Jamella said.

And yet, "The Wizard of Oz" and "The Godfather" are by no means what Katie

O'Brien would consider to be religious films. "I was really surprised. I never think of God in those movies," said Katie, 17, a parishioner at St. Theodore's in Gates.

"It's almost as if they learn about God and don't quite know it," noted Pollack, who lectures frequently about faith and film around the Diocese of Rochester. "I want them to think outside the box — how do we recognize God in these things?"

Later this school year, students will examine "savior"-type characters who win freedom for an oppressed population, such as in "Planet of the Apes" and "Chicken Run." The class also probes what makes certain movie characters likeable or detestable, and what provokes these reactions.

"Jesus of Nazareth" and "Jesus Christ Superstar" are among the movies that plug into the course's upcoming section titled "The Divine on Film." Finally, the course will study the virtues of numerous characters; for example, even murderous gangsters in "The Godfather" will place high value on family ties and loyalty.

Pollack said she notifies parents in advance of the course's planned movie list. Although an occasional R-rated movie is shown, Pollack said she generally avoids "R" movies that are also classified "Morally Offensive" by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Office for Film and Broadcasting.

While viewing, students are permitted



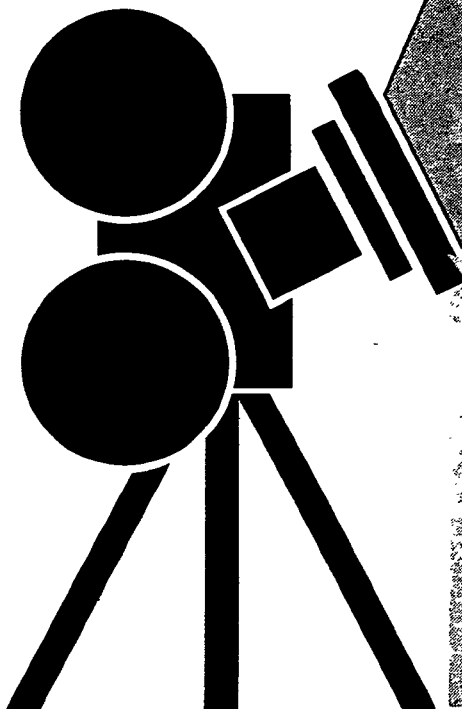
The family classic "The Wizard of Oz" starred (from left) Bert Lahr, Ray Bolger, Judy Garland and Jack Haley.



Sam Emerson/Twentieth Century Fox

Thade (Tim Roth, left), military leader of the apes, subdues Leo (Mark Wahlberg), in the 2001 film "Planet of the Apes."

Story by
Mike Latona



A scene from the 2000 movie "Chicken Run."

to sit on the classroom floor and from time heads up with glasses. However, those who don't pay attention are given credit for simply watching movies for a surprise.

"A lot of them think it will be easy," Pollack said. Jamella admitted she originally had that attitude, but it disappeared quickly. "The class, you can't relax, you have to pay attention," she said.

Due to the habits they've developed, Katie and Jamella said they pay more attention to movies even when they're watching at home or in the theater.

"My mom notices that on her own, I don't think about movies," Jamella noted, with a smile. "I think the person isn't interested in the new-found ability to crack a movie."

"My sister says, 'I'm not watching a movie with you again because you analyze everything. I'm putting you off the class,'" she remarked.