

Young Adults

Teachers-to-be learn from veteran teachers

Story by Rob Cullivan

In December, Charlene McCarthy's first-grade class at Holy Family School, Rochester, was learning about one-syllable words that rhyme with "et," as in "met," "wet" and "jet." Teacher McCarthy asked the students to come up with the shortened name of a doctor who works with animals. After hearing such responses as "nurse" and "animal control," she and the class settle on "vet."

One student expressed amazement that another student gave an incorrect answer. "Remember," McCarthy said, "we all don't know everything."

Hovering over the seated first-graders, Brandi Akerstrom, 24, and Stacey Ellis, 28, moved slowly from child to child, gently encouraging them. Both are graduate education students at Nazareth College and had been in the class every Tuesday since September. Their work was part of a weekly course that combined discussions of teaching theory with experiences of teaching practice, according to Kim Wieczorek, assistant professor of education at Nazareth, and the women's instructor.

"Just being in a city environment is good," Wieczorek said of Holy Family. The school serves one of the poorest student populations in the Diocese of Rochester, according to school officials. "Working right with the kids — it's nice that Holy Family lets us in to do that."

Sister Lorraine Burns of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Holy Family's principal, said Holy Family inaugurated the course to help the Nazareth students learn about difficulties that face urban children, including growing up in single-parent homes and low-income families.

"Our school is an excellent training ground," she said. "Our teachers bring years of experience and hard work, and the Nazareth program brings in fresh ways to address problems that weren't as prevalent when many of us were starting out."

The course, which ended last month, was in its second year at Holy Family. Nazareth is the first college in the diocese to offer a teaching course on-site at diocesan elementary schools. Akerstrom and Ellis said they welcomed the chance to regularly see a teacher in action. Each Tuesday, the 21 Nazareth



Karin von Voigtlander/Photo intern

Brandi Akerstrom, a student teacher, listens to the banter of Na'Jeeb Bailey (right), 6, and Carey Bedell, 6, at Holy Family School.

students in the class, who come from a variety of career and educational backgrounds, met with Wieczorek in the school's music room in the morning for a one-hour lecture. They then went in pairs for another hour into a classroom, and from there attended another hour-long lecture and discussion.

Akerstrom studied in college to be a physical therapist, but changed her mind and decided to become a teacher. Working in a half-day kindergarten in

Louisiana a few years back inspired her to change her career, she said.

"I didn't realize I loved it until I left it," she said of teaching. "I loved the fact that I felt like I was doing something, that I was benefiting someone's life."

She said watching a veteran teacher like McCarthy work with the children allowed her to ponder what she'll need to be a successful teacher.

"You can read a book, and they can tell you what to expect, but you don't re-

ally know till you're there," she said.

Both she and Ellis said they've learned they'll have to use different styles of teaching to reach different children. Both want to work with young students. The women spoke of the delight of drawing pictures for the students, giving them kind words when they were discouraged, and how much they would miss the children when the course ended. Ellis, who grew up attending St. Paul's Church in Webster, has worked as a sociotherapist with emotionally disturbed young people, and said she enjoys the fact that youngsters take a delight in learning.

"I like that they're able to joke. They're just at such a fun age."

Margaret Halligan, 28, a parishioner at Mother of Sorrows Parish in Greece, also took part in the Nazareth class at Holy Family. She is interested in teaching grades K-three.

"They were my favorite grades when I was little, and children that age are so amazing as they learn and grow so much," she said.

Halligan currently works as an individualized care coordinator at Hillside Children's Center in Rochester and said she came to realize she wanted to be a teacher through her experiences as a social worker.

"Through my work at Hillside I had the opportunity to work in several different environments, including schools," she said. "They were my favorite settings, and I was able to meet some wonderful and inspiring teachers."

Halligan spent her time at Holy Family observing pre-kindergarten classes. She, too, said she's learned the importance of changing one's teaching style to fit each individual student. For example, the women pointed out, some students do better when taught with a large amount of visual aids, whereas others tend to learn better through a more verbal approach.

Most importantly, Ekerstrom said, she's learned how to speak to children by watching McCarthy. Rather than dismissing a child's incorrect answer to a question, the veteran teacher used the student's answer as a prompt for more questioning to help lead the student to the correct answer, Ekerstrom said.

"She never says 'No, that's wrong.' You don't want to shut a kid off. That's what learning's about — trying."

Events

For further information on these events, call the numbers listed or go to the Young Adult link on the diocesan Web site, www.dor.org.

o World Youth Day information sessions: Jan. 26, St. Alphonsus, Auburn, 10-11:30 a.m.; Jan. 27, St. Pius X, Chili, 2-3:30 p.m.; Jan. 31, St. John of Rochester, Pennington, 7-8:30 p.m.; Feb. 6, St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads, 7-8:30 p.m.; and Feb. 20, St. Ambrose, Rochester, 7-8:30 p.m. World Youth Day, for ages 16-35, will be held 22-28 in Toronto.

o Holy Family Heart, 585-328-2210 or 1-800-386-7177, ext. 218 or 219 (Monroe County) by visit to www.holyfamilyheart.org or 1-800-386-7177.

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Odyssey, a diocesan young-adult coalition for 20s and 30s (single and married) in Monroe County. RSVP to Louis at 585/429-6083 or pay at door (cost is \$10 per person).

o Friday and Saturday, Feb. 1-2: Seekers Retreat, Long Point Camp near Penn Yan. An overnight retreat of discussion, prayer, talks and recreation for ages 18-25. Call Sylvia Mancuso at 585/328-3210, ext. 295 or 1-800-386-7177, ext. 295 (outside Monroe County).

o Thursday, Feb. 7: Theology on Tap, Johnny's Smoke-Free, 1382 Culver Road, Rochester. Theme: Love and Relationships. Presenter: Father Dan Ghose. Contact Nora Bradbury at 585/328-3210, ext. 218 or 219.

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