

Tutors aid pupils via Project Unity

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

If you want to learn some cold, hard facts about the arctic fox, just ask Isaiah Gibson, a first-grader at St. Andrew's School in Rochester.

"He is the size of a house cat," Isaiah said as he read from the short book he created called *The Arctic Fox*. "He is white in the winter. He is gray in the summer."

Over the course of almost five weeks, Isaiah created the book, which he proudly read aloud to his tutor, Mary Worth, in a classroom at his school. A liturgical ministers coordinator at Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, Worth recalled the first time he read it aloud to her, and what she said to him afterward.

"I said, 'I just want to congratulate you because you just wrote your first book.'" She added that the boy grew wide-eyed as she spoke, as the realization of his achievement settled over him.

Watching children blossom into eager students motivates Worth to tutor at St. Andrew's, she said. At one time in her life, she was a CBS News producer who stood daily in the same broadcast room as Dan Rather. Now a stay-at-home mother, she noted that sitting in a classroom working one-on-one with a small child is just as fulfilling as her career in the national news industry once was.

"I love to be here, right where I am, tutoring these kids," she said. "This is real life."

Worth is one of 18 tutors currently working at St. Andrew's through Project Unity, a multilevel effort by diocesan Catholic Charities to build relationships between rural, urban

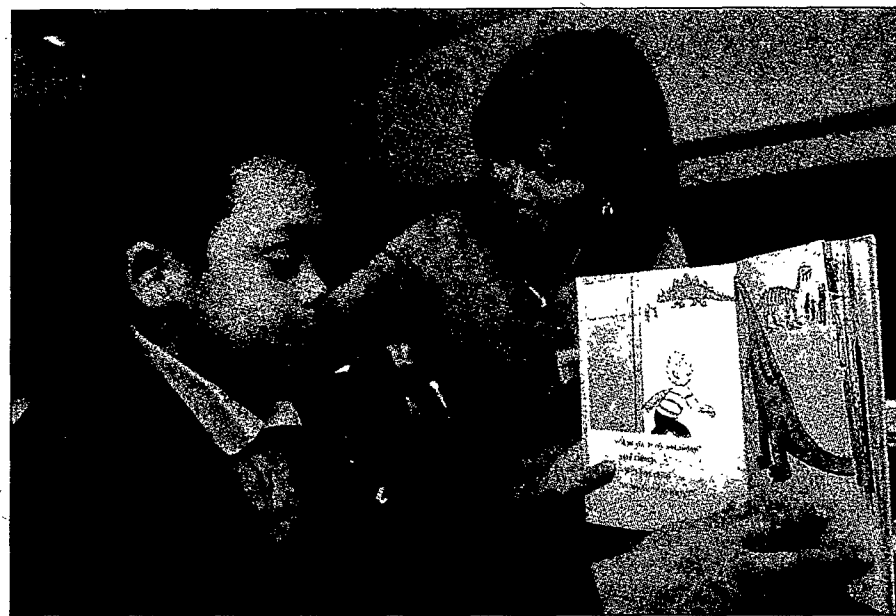
and suburban parishes. The tutoring program is coordinated by Chrissy Carpenter, a member of the Catholic Charities board, and her husband, Bill, chairman of the diocesan Stewardship Council. The couple are parishioners at St. Louis Parish in Pittsford.

Chrissy Carpenter noted that the tutoring program is designed to help children do better in school as well as break down barriers that may divide Catholic parishioners from different regions of the diocese, a goal that in Worth's mind has already been achieved. To explain, Worth noted that she wasn't sure what it was she was getting into when she decided to volunteer at an "inner-city school." However, any qualms she had were dispelled the moment she entered the building, she said.

"You come into this calm, light-filled school, and the kids are very respectful," she said of St. Andrew's. More importantly, she sees her own children's dreams paralleled in the dreams expressed by the students at the school.

"They have every reason to be just as hopeful as my kids, or any kids," Worth said.

Carpenter added that Project Unity hopes to place 20 to 25 tutors in each of Rochester's six Wegmans Inner City Voucher, or WIN, schools, within the next two years. WIN schools are funded by Robert and Peggy Wegman of Wegmans Food Markets. Catholic Charities officials asked the Carpenters last year to recruit Catholics for the Project Unity program, Chrissy Carpenter said, noting that you don't have to have any teaching ex-



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Mary Worth, who tutors at Rochester's St. Andrew's School through the Project Unity program, smiles as she listens to 8-year-old Isaiah Gibson read a story at the school Jan. 21.

perience to be a tutor.

"If you've been a parent and helped your child with homework, you know what one-on-one helping is all about," she said.

Indeed, Worth said her tutoring consists of listening to her students read; practicing spelling words; and helping them with their school projects, such as Isaiah's book.

The Carpenters sent out a letter to a number of area Catholics last September, inviting them to a meeting in their home Oct. 2 for prospective tutors. Tutors were asked to volunteer for at least one year, and tutor a student in basic reading and/or math during at least one 40-minute session a week during school hours, Chrissy Carpenter said. She added that the WIN schools could also use volunteers who may not be able to do weekly sessions, but could occasionally volunteer for such events as field trips and other special activities.

Carol Finucane, a parishioner at

Transfiguration, was one of the people who attended the October meeting at the Carpenters' home. She now tutors at St. Andrew's once a week. A reading resource teacher at Allen Creek Elementary School in Pittsford, she said she welcomes the opportunity to work one-on-one with a fifth-grade girl at St. Andrew's.

"I think it's incredibly positive for her," Finucane said of her student. "She does seem to like the attention and has no problem coming to see me."

She added that she would encourage anyone with the time to do it to consider tutoring through Project Unity.

"I think it's a terrific opportunity for people to have a big impact on individuals," she said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To learn more about the Project Unity tutoring program, call Chrissy and Bill Carpenter at 585/381-1459.

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This issue will give parishes, retreat and spirituality centers ample opportunity to heighten awareness of their programs before the start of Lent. In addition to the opportunity for display advertising, this issue also will include a listing of retreat and spirituality centers in the Diocese of Rochester.

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