

Quilt project warms bodies, hearts

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

PENFIELD — Louis Zambelli III said it “kind of makes me sad” to know that children are born with medical difficulties and must spend extended time in the hospital. But through his class’s quilt-making project, Louis is helping put a positive light on some tough situations.

“It will make me feel happier if they feel warm while they have all their problems,” said Louis, 12, a sixth-grader at St. Joseph’s School.

The project, in its 11th year, has generated more than 1,000 quilts out of St. Joseph’s. Produced by the school’s third- and sixth-grade classes, the items are forwarded annually to the Golisano Children’s Hospital at Strong Memorial Hospital.

This year’s students began their project around Christmas when they and their families purchased the quilting material. Louis opted for a pattern with stars, colored squares and safety-pin patterns. And third-grader Abby Bardanis, 9, designed a quilt with pictures of little babies on it.

Sixth-grader Kate Dobler, 12, said she had originally chosen a flame pattern — “stuff more geared for our age. But my mother said I might scare the baby,” said Kate, who said she instead went with a star design.

“That’s half the fun for them, picking out something neat,” said Janet Triplett, a sixth-grade teacher.

The classes designated three Wednesdays in January to work on the quilts in school. They also toiled over them at home with the assistance of family members. “I decided to do it just by hand,” Abby said proudly of her quilt.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Emily Triplett (left), a sixth-grader at St. Joseph’s School in Penfield, smiles Jan. 29 while watching her sewing partner, third-grader Michelle Mauro, work on a quilt they will donate to the Golisano Children’s Hospital at Strong Memorial Hospital.

Third-grader Nicholas Fields, 9, had no prior experience with quilting but was happy with the one he produced. “I hope somebody who really needs a quilt, gets it,” he said.

Kate said her quilt came up a bit smaller than the suggested size of 36 inches by 36 inches. However, she said optimistically, “My little sister, she was a ‘preemie’ (born prematurely). So I’m hoping mine might go to a preemie, too.”

The quilting project was begun in 1992 by Christine Ward, a sixth-grade teacher at St. Joseph’s, and Carol Crosby, a third-grade teacher



who is now retired. Ward said the effort originated to help infants in the neo-natal intensive care unit at Strong, and has since grown to include toddlers and slightly older children. Once, Ward said, the school even produced a full-sized quilt by special request for a teenage girl who had been in an automobile accident.

Along with Ward and Triplett’s sixth-graders, this year’s quilts were

made by the third-grade classes of Jean Rogers and Debbie Sinclair. Individuals from the third and sixth grades were paired up as sewing partners.

A representative from the children’s hospital is expected to visit St. Joseph’s in March to pick up the quilts during an assembly, when all the creations will be displayed at once. Triplett noted that representatives often share touching stories, describing little children who walk around the hospital clutching their quilts. Triplett also said this project is near and dear to her because “I had a niece born at Strong with some complications, and she received a quilt from one of my students.” She added that the niece, now nearly 2 years old, is healthy.

Though the school project is now largely completed, Nicholas said his sewing days aren’t over quite yet. He enjoyed making a quilt with his grandmother so much, they plan to combine on another.

“I’m going to keep that one for myself,” Nicholas said.

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